What Jesus Didn't Know

A Defense of Kenotic Christology

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Introduction

For a long time, Christians have affirmed that Jesus is both God and man. For a long time, this has gotten us in trouble. Ancient objectors to the faith scoffed at such a notion, and modern objectors are rarely more sympathetic. For many, the idea that a man could be God is simply absurd. One is infinite, the other is finite. One is created, and the other is eternal. For other objectors, the issue is most strongly manifested by the depiction of Jesus offered in the Gospels. Jesus is depicted as eating, drinking, sleeping, being tired, being impatient, and all the other weaknesses that humans possess. Most significantly, Jesus explicitly says he does not know the hour of his second coming (Matthew 24:36), and he is described as growing in wisdom (Luke 2:52). If God is all-knowing, and Jesus does not know something, doesn't this mean he isn't God?

For many objectors to Christianity, the answer is an emphatic "Yes!" One does not have to search long or hard on the internet to find somebody presenting this argument. The prominence of this argument should encourage Christians to take seriously the need for a good response. However, I believe that many theologians have failed to provide a good response to this argument. Most answers offered by Christian theologians deny that Jesus lacked knowledge of his second coming, and many creative strategies are employed to obscure the obvious meaning of the text. These strategies are not only unfaithful to the biblical text, they also portray the Christian as deliberately obtuse.

However, there have been some good responses over the centuries. One possible response, gaining prominence from the nineteenth-century German theologian Gottfried Thomasius, is to say that when Jesus became incarnate, he

emptied himself of knowledge and power. This position came to be known as the kenotic view, gaining its name from the Greek word used by Paul to describe Christ "emptying" himself at the incarnation (Philippians 2:5-8). This language in Philippians 2 complements Paul's claim in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that Christ "was rich, yet for your sake he became poor." One might also be tempted to find this idea in Hebrews 2:17 which says that Christ "had to be made like his brothers in every respect."

Kenotic Christology offers a simple and intuitive understanding of these passages that explains why Jesus is depicted in a limited manner. Yet, kenotic Christology has long been accused of undermining the divinity of Christ. Opponents of this view have objected that if Jesus gave up any power or knowledge at the incarnation, then Jesus would not have been God. The underlying assumption of this objection is that omnipotence and omniscience are essential attributes of God and that Christ therefore could not abandon them and remain divine. The purpose of this work is to show that this objection fails, and that kenotic Christology remains a viable way of understanding the incarnation.

In Chapter 1, I will present a brief history of objections to kenotic Christology. This history will focus on the arguments presented against kenotic Christology, and how proponents of kenotic Christology have answered them. These objections include those raised by the main historical opponents of kenotic Christology, such as Francis Hall and Isaak Dorner, along with more contemporary objections raised by Richard Swinburne, Andrew Loke, and William Lane Craig. This chapter is not intended to discuss every thinker who has weighed in on this matter. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to quickly bring the reader up to speed on how the debate has proceeded so far. Similar arguments are often raised by multiple thinkers, so focusing only on the arguments will allow for greater brevity. It is also worth noting that this chapter (and this work as a whole) will mainly focus on objections to kenotic Christology that relate to the deity of Christ being compromised. Some writers object to kenotic Christology not because it brings the incarnate Christ too low,

but because it exalts the pre-incarnate Christ too high. Objections of this nature are outside the scope of this project.

In Chapter 2, a strategy will be offered that allows kenotic Christology to avoid the objections surveyed in Chapter 1. This strategy will utilize a model of the Trinity popularized by William Lane Craig and strengthened by Andrew Kirschner. In doing this, I will argue that Christians can maintain that Jesus lacked omnipotence/omniscience, that these are essential attributes of God, and that Jesus was still God in the incarnation. This is done by clarifying what it means to say Jesus "is God," and by investigating what conditions are required to predicate divinity to a person. This strategy is then defended from potential objections.

In Chapter 3, a second strategy will be offered that allows kenotic Christology to avoid the objections raised in Chapter 1. This second strategy stands independently of the strategy presented in Chapter 2, though works well in conjunction with it. This second strategy will examine the dominant definitions of omnipotence used in theology and argue that these definitions allow for a kenotic Christ to still be classified as omnipotent. This will be done by noting that virtually no definition of omnipotence requires the ability to perform immoral acts. If an immoral act is outside the realm of omnipotence, and God can make any action immoral by promising not to do it, then God can take on massive limitations without ever compromising his omnipotence. After addressing omnipotence, a similar strategy is proposed for omniscience.

In Chapter 4, I will note the benefits that kenotic Christology has to offer the church. I argue that the most significant benefit is that kenotic Christology presents the best explanation for how Jesus is depicted in the Gospels. I will use Jesus' claim of ignorance about the hour of his second coming found in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 as a test case for comparing kenotic Christology with non-kenotic approaches. In making this argument, I examine alternative explanations offered by non-kenotic theologians such as William Lane Craig, Andrew Loke, and Timothy Pawl. I argue that these other explanations are contrived, inconsistent, or improbable. Additionally, these

alternative explanations undercut the ability of Christians to have meaningful dialogue with our interlocutors.

It is all the rage these days to begin one's work by noting one's biases and dispositions. In the spirit of this trend, I make the following remarks: I am a practicing Christian who affirms the divinity of Christ, the truth of the Trinity, and the authority of Scripture. While philosophical arguments are important tools for theological inquiry, I submit these to the revelation of God contained in the Bible. If I must choose between making my argument compatible with Scripture or making it compatible with a philosophical model, my disposition is to choose compatibility with Scripture. I believe that this is the only proper conduct for a Christian theologian. However, I believe it is the responsibility of every Christian to be able to answer those who ask about the hope that is within us. Part of giving such an answer involves doing so in a rational way, and kenotic Christology has long been critiqued for failing in this regard. Because of this, the majority of this work is dedicated to philosophical arguments and reflection.

While I see theological value in studying the works of those who have come before me, I do not feel compelled to make my views compatible with any specific theologian or council. Because of this, I have made almost no mention of the Christological debates that plagued the early church. If my reader feels compelled to make their theology compliant with any councils or church fathers, I will defer to their abilities to judge this work in that regard. Finally, I will note that all Scriptures quoted in this work are from the ESV translation unless otherwise noted.

Chapter One

The Debate So Far

Introduction

The following sections are focused on providing an overview of objections to kenotic Christology that stem from Christ's divinity. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive list of every thinker, objection, or rejoinder that has appeared in the kenotic literature. Rather, the aim of this chapter is to provide a sufficient sampling of the kenotic Christological debate so that the reader knows where the contemporary debate stands and how the following chapters interact with the ongoing conversation.

Objections Regarding God's Essential Attributes

The most significant and sustained objection to kenotic Christology is the claim that it undercuts the divinity of Christ. Proponents of kenotic Christology often suggest that Jesus emptied himself of certain divine properties such as omnipotence and omniscience while remaining God. However, critics have argued that Jesus cannot lack these properties and remain God, as they are essential to deity. Francis Hall puts the issue bluntly when he asks, "Was He

God or not?"[1] He argues that if Jesus possessed all divine attributes, then he was undoubtedly God. However, if any attributes were lacking, then Jesus could not be considered divine. In Hall's view, the logic of kenoticism is "utterly inconsistent with a real acceptance of the Christian dogma that Jesus Christ was very God."[2]

Isaak Dorner, one of kenotic Christology's earliest opponents, also raises concerns about the implications of kenoticism on the essential nature of God. He contends that if the Logos had surrendered the knowledge of God, the Logos would be surrendering an attribute that is essential to divinity. Doing so would "violate the idea of God."[3] Albrecht Ritschl similarly criticizes the notion of the eternal Logos emptying himself of divine attributes. Ritschl contends that if Jesus did so, then in his historical existence he would not be the possessor of Godhead, thereby compromising the core tenet of his divine nature.[4] Baillie further elaborates on this objection by emphasizing that even though the Son of God may maintain his personal identity while assuming human attributes, divesting himself of distinctively divine attributes would imply that "in becoming human He ceased to be divine."[5]

In response to the debate regarding the essential attributes of divinity and whether Jesus possessed them, Stephen Davis maintains that a property such as omniscience simpliciter should not be regarded as an essential attribute of God, but merely an attribute.[6] In contrast to being omniscient simpliciter, Davis suggests that Jesus is essentially omniscient *in some sense*. Davis believes

1. Francis Hall, *The Kenotic Theory; Considered With Particular Reference to Its Anglican Forms and Arguments* (Green & Co., 1898), https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009777559 , 221.

2. Ibid, 222.

3. Isaak Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 3, (T. & T. Clark, 1882), 266-267.

5. Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (Faber & Faber, 1887), https://archive.org/details/godwasinchristes0000bail_g0s3/page/96/mode/2up , 96-97.

6. Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Eerdmans, 1983), 127.

that an omniscient being could temporarily make themselves non-omniscient.[7] However, if they can resume omniscience, they can still be considered omniscience in some sense of the word, even after limiting themselves. Thus, according to Davis, it would be inaccurate to look at Jesus' incarnated life and declare that he is not divine based on his lack of omniscience simpliciter. Jesus is an omniscient being who set aside his omniscience and can still retake it, which makes him omniscient in some sense.

Can the same thing be done with omnipotence? Can one say that an omnipotent being can give up their omnipotence while still being able to pick it back up again? Davis seems sympathetic to this idea,[8] but William Lane Craig offers the following concern:

> If, having relinquished omnipotence, he retained the power to get omnipotence back again, then he never in fact ceased to be omnipotent, since omnipotence is a modal property concerning what one can do.[9]

This objection illustrates a real weakness in kenotic accounts which seek to maintain that Christ can at any moment retake his omnipotence or omniscience, and the issue might best be understood with a thought experiment. Suppose that my wife asks me to drive down to the store to pick up a carton of eggs for a pie she is making. The task of driving to the store can only be completed if I have the keys to my car. Alas, the keys remain on the bedside table while I am all the way in the den. Would it be correct to reply to my wife that I am unable to drive to the store? I suspect that all our intuitions indicate that this would be an inaccurate (and unwise) response. Although I don't have

7. Ibid, 125-128.

8. Ibid, 159.

9. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2017), 605.

the keys, and the keys are essential to completing the task, it is within my abilities to acquire the keys, which means it is still within my ability to complete the task. The steps required to complete the task are slightly longer, but it remains within my abilities.

Let us now take this line of thought and apply it to the incarnate Christ. While Christ is incarnate, if He is not omnipotent, then it must be the case that there is some possible state of affairs that He is incapable of bringing about but would be able to bring about if he was omnipotent. However, if He can at any moment "pick up" His powers of omnipotence, then it does not make sense to say that He is unable to bring about the state of affairs in question. Just as I can easily pick up my keys, which makes it possible for me to run to the store, Christ can pick up His powers, which makes it possible for Him to perform the task in question. However, if Christ can at any moment bring about the state of affairs in question, then how can one say His omnipotence is lost?

Suppose the issue discussed above is set aside; one might note that Jesus being able to pick up His powers at any moment undercuts one of the main drivers of kenotic theory. An arguing point for believing that Jesus laid down His power, and not merely hid them, is that if Jesus did not give them up, He did not truly share in our lot. If Jesus always had an escape, His suffering was not truly comparable to ours. However, if Jesus is at any moment able to pick up omnipotence, Jesus does not seem much closer to our level of suffering than if He just kept His omnipotence and did not exercise it. In both cases, Jesus had an ace up His sleeve that we do not have. These remarks should caution us from saying that Jesus could simply pick these powers back up. If one wants to maintain that Jesus really emptied Himself of omnipotence, and not merely hid it, it seems that one must hold that Christ was unable to pick up His powers at any time He pleased.

Returning to Davis's position, it's worth noting that Davis's motivation for rejecting omnipotence simpliciter as an essential attribute of God is not solely driven by incarnational concerns. In contemplating the classic question, "Can God create a stone so big He can't lift it?" Davis remarks:

> My intuitions say yes - that God can indeed do this if He chooses - which is one of the reasons I am suspicious of the doctrine that God is not just omnipotent but essentially omnipotent. My intuitions, for example, say that a God who can voluntarily relinquish His own omnipotence is more powerful than a God who cannot.[10]

While Davis has these intuitions, he notes that others may share intuitions in the opposite direction. Davis notes, "Someone may object that necessary omnipotence is part of the concept of God, but the only reply this objection requires is to insist that it is not part of my concept of God, nor do I see any reason why it must be part of the Christian concept of God."[11] Such a response places the burden on the objector as to why their intuitions regarding essential attributes should be regarded as the correct ones.

Davis also draws attention to a central issue regarding the debate about essential attributes, namely, that it is difficult to demonstrate for most existing entities what their essential attributes actually are. Davis remarks, "Is it true that God would not be God if He were not omniscient, e.g., if He had forgotten some fact? I don't see how anyone could know this. I cannot prove that omniscience is an accidental rather than essential property of God, but it seems so to me."[12] Similarly, it seems impossible to prove that omnipotence/omniscience is an essential rather than an accidental property of God. At this point, one might be tempted to think that the debate is at an impasse.

However, the kenotic proponent has a justification that their opponents lack. Davis notes, "The fact that I believe both that Jesus Christ was God and that Jesus Christ was non-omniscient leads me to deny that omniscience is

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10. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, 73.

11. Ibid, 76.

12. Ibid, 124.

essential to God." [13] Ronald Feenstra notes that Davis's theological method here is completely appropriate for a Christian thinker.[14] Davis does not form a conception of God and impose that conception onto Scripture. Rather, Davis uses data from Scripture to form and inform his conception of God.

Feenstra defends this theological method by noting that it has been a common tactic among major Christian thinkers.[15] Tertullian, when confronted with claims by Marcion that it is impossible for God to be born, suffer, and die, responded as follows:

> If, to be sure, He had chosen to be born of a mere animal, and were to preach the kingdom of heaven invested with the body of a beast either wild or tame, your censure (I imagine) would have instantly met Him with this demurrer: This is disgraceful for God, and this is unworthy of the Son of God, and simply foolish. For no other reason than because one thus judges. It is of course foolish, if we are to judge God by our own conceptions. But, Marcion, consider well this Scripture, if indeed you have not erased it: God has chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise. [16]

Karl Barth, though he was a critic of kenotic Christology, remarked similarly that, "Who God is and what it is to be divine is something we must learn

13. Ibid, 124.

14. Ronald Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ (Mackintosh, Thomasius)," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1984), 138.

15. Ronald Feenstra, "A Kenotic Christological Method for Understanding the Divine Attributes," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Regent College, 2010), 158.

16. Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Volume 3: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian. I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Scribner's Sons, 1913), https://archive.org/details/antenicenefather03robe/page/n5/mode/2up , 524

where God has revealed Himself and His nature, the essence of the divine."[17] N.T. Wright remarks that "By close attention to Jesus himself, we are invited to discover, perhaps for the first time, just who the creator and covenant God was and is all along."[18] C.S. Lewis, in a passage not related to the incarnation, remarks that:

> Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have.[19]

To conclude this point, if it truly is the case that kenotic Christology conflicts with our intuitions about what a perfect being must be like (which is debatable), a theologian can reasonably say "So much the worse for our intuitions."

Thomas Morris, though not a proponent of kenotic theory, has suggested that a kenotic theologian might replace omnipotence as an essential attribute with something like "being omnipotent unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise."[20] This response is similar to Davis's proposal, with the benefit of being more specific than "omnipotent in some sense." Morris's suggested properties would still be possessed by Jesus once incarnated, so no relinquishing of a property is needed.

Feenstra raises a concern about Morris's qualification by arguing that it has the problematic entailment that every member of the Trinity could

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17. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* vol. IV, pt. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 186.

18. N. T. Wright and Marcus Borg, *The Truth of the Gospel and Christian Living* (HarperCollins, 1999), 214.

20. Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God* (InterVarsity, 1991), 167.

simultaneously give up their divine power.[21] In responding to Feenstra's objection, Peter Forrest represents Feenstra's argument as follows:

(1) Each divine person has the unqualified power to abdicate normal divine powers.
(2) If a number of persons have the unqualified power to do something, then it is possible that they all exercise that power.
(3) If all divine persons exercise the divine power to abdicate normal divine powers, then God as a whole would cease to have normal divine powers.
(4) But necessarily God retains normal divine powers.[22]

Feenstra seeks to avoid this issue by modifying the power in (1) to only include the ability of abdicating power if it is for redemptive purposes. Feenstra writes:

> The property of being omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate (where a kenotic incarnation is understood as freely chosen, temporary, and for the purpose of reconciliation) is an essential property of each divine person. So, when the Son freely, temporarily, and for the purpose of redemption becomes kenotically incarnate, it is no longer a live option for either the Father or the Holy Spirit to become incarnate in this way. And once the Son has accomplished the work of reconciliation, then Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be said to be unchangeably and unalterably omniscient.[23]

21. Ronald Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology.," in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame Press, 1989), 140.

22. Peter Forrest, "The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 131.

23. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," 141.

However, Forrest argues that this modification does not relieve Feenstra of the issue at hand. Forrest notes that, in addition to being ad hoc, the suggestion that the divine powers can only be abdicated if it's for the purpose of redemption still leaves open the possibility that all the persons of the Trinity become incarnate at once.[24] If there are three planets whose inhabitants simultaneously need redemption, then even with Feenstra's modified power there is the opportunity for all the Trinity members to give up their power.

Feenstra considers the possibility of rejecting (1) which would entail that only one member of the Trinity has the modified property suggested by Morris. However, Feenstra rejects this avenue of defense because he believes it violates the orthodox belief in the metaphysical equality of the persons.[25] Feenstra is not alone in this concern, as Thomas McCall, in discussing Feenstra's treatment of this issue, remarks that to ascribe different essential attributes to the members of the Trinity entails a difference in essence, and thus "We find that the *homoousion* is impaled."[26]

Because of the above concerns, Forrest resolves not to reject (1).[27] Rejecting (3) would entail that there is some divine force in addition to the members of the Trinity which operates through the members of the Trinity, which conflicts with Forrest's conception of God. As a result, Forrest proceeds to consider (2) and (4). Forrest argues that one's rejection or acceptance of (4) will likely depend on one's acceptance or rejection of God's necessary goodness. If one holds that God is necessarily good, then it seems one should retain (4). This line of reasoning rests on the notion that God as a whole abandoning power constitutes something wrong or foolish, and intuitively this notion seems hard to shake. It seems that having a being with normal divine powers in the world is better than not having such a being in the world, and thus to give up those

24. Forrest, "A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," 132.

25. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," pp. 141-142.

26. Thomas McCall, "Modified Kenotic Christology, The Trinity and Christian Orthodoxy" (Ph.D. Diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2004), 27.

27. Forrest, "A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," 132.

powers would be to deprive the world of a great good. Forrest notes that such a divine emptying might very well interfere with the life of the Trinity.

With the above considerations in mind, Forrest sets his sights on (2) and argues that it should be rejected.[28] Forrest maintains that one can have the freedom to exercise a power even if one necessarily never does. Forrest provides the example of a necessarily wise person who has the power to be foolish but does not exercise it. However, one might object that it seems strained to say that a person has the power to do X if there is no possible world in which the person performs X. Whether one finds Forrest's solution in rejecting (2) satisfactory rests largely on if one thinks its coherent to say "X has the power to bring about Y even though there is no possible world in which X does so."

In addition to the above remarks, it should be objected that Feenstra, McCall, and Forrest are likely mistaken in their claim that a rejection of (1) would entail a rejection of orthodox Christology. Orthodox Christology has long accepted a difference between the members of the Trinity in its doctrine of eternal generation. This doctrine enjoys creedal support in the Nicaean assertion that Christ is "begotten of the Father before all worlds," and maintains that Christ derives his existence from the Father.[29] Though Christ is co-eternal and of the same substance as the Father, he nonetheless is different in the aspect that he depends upon another for his existence while the Father does not depend upon another.

One only need to look at the great writers of the church to see this doctrine expressed in full force. Athanasius approves of Dionysius's comment that "the Son has His being not of Himself but of the Father."[30] Athanasius

28. Ibid, 132-133.

29. William Lane Craig, "Is God the Son Begotten in His Divine Nature?," *Theologica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 3, no. 1 (2019): 22–32.

30. Athanasius, "On the Opinion of Dionysius," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, series 2 vol. 4, (T&T Clark, 1885), 15.

elsewhere understands Christ's statements about the Father being greater than he "because of His generation from the Father Himself."[31] Hilary remarks:

> The Father is greater than the Son: for manifestly He is greater Who makes another to be all that He Himself is, Who imparts to the Son by the mystery of the birth the image of His own unbegotten nature, Who begets Him from Himself into His own form.[32]

Basil remarks that "The evident solution is that the Greater refers to origination, while the Equal belongs to the Nature"[33] and "That which is from such a Cause is not inferior to that which has no Cause; for it would share the glory of the Unoriginate, because it is from the Unoriginate."[34]

The point of the above remarks is not to claim that the doctrine of eternal generation is true, nor to comment upon if it makes the Son less than the Father. Nor are the above remarks intended to show that premise one is unassailable. The point of these remarks is that if the Church has had no problem with saying that the Son is caused while the Father is not, how can an objector say (with a straight face) that denying premise one would be unorthodox? Are we to believe that saying only the Son has the property "able to be kenotically incarnate" is somehow more of a metaphysical difference than saying that the Son is caused while the Father is not? If the Son being caused and the Father being uncaused is not sufficient grounds to claim inequality in the Godhead, why should one

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31. Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against The Arians," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, series 2 vol. 4, (T&T Clark, 1885), 1.13.58.

32. Hilary of Poiters, "On the Trinity," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, and W. Sanday, trans. E.W Watson and L. Pullan, vol. 9, 2 (The Christian Literature Company, 1908), https://archive.org/details/selectlibraryofn09scha/page/n7/mode/2up , 9.54.

33. Basil, "Fourth Theological Oration," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Schaff Philip and Henry Wace, vol. 8, 2 (T&T Clark, 1894), 9.

34. Ibid.

take seriously the accusation that only Christ having the potential for kenosis is evidence of inequality in the Godhead? If the church can say that Christ deriving his existence from the Father does not make him less, it seems like the church can also say that only Christ having the ability to undergo kenosis does not make him less.

Aside from the above remarks, the objections against rejecting premise one fail to note that not all differences are a matter of superiority and inferiority. Is Christ greater than the Spirit because Christ is the one who descended into hell and freed the captives? Is the Spirit greater than the Father because the Spirit is the one who dwells in us? Is the Father greater for sending the Son, or is the Son greater for being sent by the Father? Just because one ascribes different properties to the members of the Trinity does not mean that those differences entail inequality in the Godhead. Surely one can believe that there are non-trivial differences in the persons of the Trinity and maintain that they are equal.

This brings us to a final issue, which is the idea that different essential properties entail a different essence. If the Son and the Father are distinct persons, that means the Son has some property such as "Is not identical to the Father." Can this property be given up? Can the Son begin to be numerically identical to the Father?[35] If one says no, they are admitting that each member of the Trinity has some essential properties that the other members lack. If one says yes, then at any moment the trinitarian God could choose to become a unitarian God, which seems more troubling than kenosis.

Thomas Senor objects to the modification provided by Morris by noting that it is not merely ad hoc, but that the properties in question are "not suitably fundamental or basic enough to play that role."[36] To illustrate this issue, Senor

35. The term "numerically identical" refers to the type of identity that an object has only with itself. One might say of two pens made in the same factory that they are identical in some sense. However, the two pens would not be numerically identical to each other. If the pens were numerically identical, they would in fact be one pen and not two.

36. Thomas Senor, "Drawing on Many Traditions: An Ecumenical Kenotic Christology," in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation.*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (Oxford University Press, 2011), 106-107.

provides the following thought experiment: Suppose that Smith believes that tigers essentially have black stripes. Now, suppose that Smith travels to India and encounters a tiger that is white, and therefore modifies his belief regarding the essential attributes of tigers. Smith now holds that tigers essentially have the property of "Being black-striped unless white."

What is wrong with this response? Senor posits that confronting the white tiger should lead Smith to conclude that "being black striped" is not an essential feature of what it means to be a tiger.[37] Similarly, Senor believes that the kenotic theologian who rejects omniscience simpliciter and instead adopts "omniscient unless freely and temporarily choosing to be incarnate" is committing a similar error as Smith. Just as the proper response for Smith is to recognize that being black-striped is not an essential aspect of tigerhood, kenotic theologians should recognize that omniscience and omnipotence were not the right type of properties to consider essential in the first place.

Craig and Moreland have also objected to this type of modification of God's essential properties saying:

> Ontologically speaking, it is not clear that there even are such properties as being-omniscient-except-when-kenotically incarnate. These contrived properties are not attributes in the sense of capacities or qualities but are really statements masquerading as attributes. They are really assertions like "Christ remains divine even if he temporarily gives up omniscience"—which is precisely the issue under dispute.[38]

Craig and Moreland make no argument for why "being omniscient except when kenotically incarnate" is not a real property, it is simply asserted. For this argument to be taken seriously, its proponent would need to give a criterion for

37. Ibid.

38. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations,* 605.

what a property is and then show that the kenotic suggestion fails to meet this criterion. No such thing has been done. While Morris's modified property may seem like a mouthful, it seems like the same thing could be expressed by saying God has the property of "being omniscient or incarnate." Is being binary a real property? If so, the above property seems to fit the bill and it secures everything previously communicated in Morris's modification.

Moreover, this critique by Craig and Moreland seems inconsistent with remarks that Craig has made elsewhere. Consider this quote from Craig:

> I have the properties of being a certain weight, of being married, of being Caucasian, of being a certain age, etc. Property talk in this light sense is just another way of saying that I weigh a certain amount, that I am married, that I am Caucasian, etc.[39]

In this quote, Craig seems to imply that (when speaking in a light sense)[40] all properties are just statements about the exemplar. If this is the case, why is Craig objecting to the kenotic theologian by saying that our modified properties are really statements masquerading as attributes? According to Craig, in general, all properties are just such statements.

The above remarks were in the context of what Craig calls a metaphysically light sense. However, when speaking in a metaphysically heavy sense, Craig remarks "I'm inclined to say that sets and properties don't really exist."[41] If

39. William Lane Craig, "#279 Is Having Properties a Criterion for Existence?," Reasonable Faith Question of the Week, August 2012.

40. "In a light sense" for Craig refers to how we use language in our everyday lives. For instance, we might say "There is a great view at the mountain." This statement does not mean that we believe there is some object called "The view" which is spatially located at the mountain top. "The view" is not an object, rather it is simply a way of referring to what all one can see from the top. In contrast, a "heavy sense" is one in which we are talking about the actual existence of objects. In a light sense there is a view at the top of the mountain, however, in a heavy sense there is not.

41. William Lane Craig, "#276 Is God a Being in the Same Sense That We Are?," *Reasonable Faith Question of the Week*, July 2012.

no properties exist in a metaphysically heavy sense, why is Craig objecting to kenotic Christology by saying it's not clear that these modified properties exist? According to Craig, ontologically speaking, no properties exist. To summarize, if we are talking about properties in a light sense, all properties are statements according to Craig and it therefore makes no sense to accuse the kenotic theologian of having statements masquerading as properties. If we are talking about properties in a heavy sense, no properties exist according to Craig and it makes no sense to object that the modified kenotic properties do not really exist.

Objections From the Contradiction of Kenosis

One line of argument brought against kenotic Christology is that it expresses a "logical contradiction which renders it beyond the pale of reasonableness."[42] Lawton argues that it is impossible for omnipotence to voluntarily will itself to be limited. Lawton argues that in order for the omnipotent will to be limited, there must be an omnipotent will exercising restraint on it. However, if Christ is not omnipotent, no omnipotent will is to be found to perform this task. Additionally, if Christ had indeed managed to restrict himself, Lawton argues that an omnipotent will and an omniscient mind would have been required to reverse the process. Christ did not possess the omnipotent will or mind (since he gave these up in kenosis), so he would have been unable to reacquire these attributes.

Feenstra responds to this style of argument by noting that a contradiction only arises if we maintain that Christ is omnipotent and non-omnipotent at the same time.[43] This is what Lawton seems to have in mind with his idea of an omnipotent will restricting an omnipotent will. However, Feenstra notes that there seems to be no logical contradiction in saying that a person had

42. John Lawton, *Conflict in Christology: A Study of British and American Christology, from 1889-1914.* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947), https://archive.org/details/conflictinchrist0000lawt/page/n5/mode/2up , 148-149.

43. Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 111.

omnipotence at one point and then ceased to have that property at another point. Feenstra floats the idea that what Christ gave up in the kenosis was not omnipotence, but the use of his omnipotence. Feenstra argues that there is nothing in the concept of omnipotence that entails that the being that possesses it must be aware of its omnipotence. As a result of this, it might be that Christ giving up his use of omnipotence is to be understood in terms of him becoming unaware of it.

While such a maneuver may be possible for omnipotence, omniscience presents a more troublesome issue. Feenstra summarizes the issue as follows:

> Omniscience is, roughly speaking, the property of knowing every true proposition. If a certain being, S, is omniscient, therefore, then the proposition, "S is omniscient," is true. Since S, being omniscient, knows every true proposition, S must certainly know the proposition, "S is omniscient." So if S is omniscient, S must be aware of S's omniscience. So if Christ was omniscient during his life on earth, then he must have been aware of his omniscience. [44]

As a result of this aspect of omniscience, Feenstra believes that the kenotic theologian must be in the position of defending that omniscience is not an essential attribute.

It is worth noting that aside from the remarks made by Feenstra, holes can be poked in Lawton's argument for other reasons. One might object to the idea that omnipotence can only be restricted by an omnipotent will. As will be argued in a later chapter, one might argue that the restrictions on Christ come from the presence of his essential goodness. Second, Lawton's argument that Christ could not reclaim his omnipotence and omniscience because reclaiming them would require an omnipotent will and an omniscient mind fails to

44. Ibid, 113.

recognize that it is only the Son that goes through kenosis. The Father retains his omniscience and omnipotence, so even if Lawton is correct in his claim of what is required for Christ to reacquire these attributes, the Father seems more than capable of meeting that requirement.

Objections From Divine Functions

An objection against kenotic Christology, made famously by William Temple, questions what was happening to the cosmos during Christ's earthly life. Temple remarks:

> What was happening to the rest of the universe during the period of our Lord's earthly life? To say that the Infant Jesus was from His cradle exercising providential care over it all is certainly monstrous; but to deny this, and yet to say that the Creative Word was so self-emptied as to have no being except in the Infant Jesus, is to assert that for a certain period the history of the world was let loose from the control of the Creative Word, and "apart from Him" very nearly everything happened that happened at all during thirty odd years, both on this planet and throughout the immensities of space.[45]

Hall similarly argues that:

> The Sacrifice has value for all men, all places, and all times. And it is certainly not too much to say that such considerations are incongruous with the idea that, when He offered Himself upon the Cross, He was bereft of those Divine attributes which

45. William Temple, *Christ the Truth: An Essay* (Macmillan, 1924), 170.

> signify the world-wide power of His Person and Its capacity for efficacious contact with all conditions and all times.[46]

In response to such allegations, Davis responds that Christ could have "planned ahead, made arrangements, settled matters ahead of time."[47] These remarks have been accused of being anthropomorphic by John Cobb[48] and potentially suggesting something "vaguely deistic" by Evans.[49] Despite this complaint by Evans, he does not think Davis is necessarily wrong. However, Evans thinks that the kenotic theologian can call upon the coinherence of the Trinity and argue that Christ, even bereft of power, was in some sense engaged in the governing of the world.

Feenstra argues that objections made from Christ's lack of world governing suffer from an overconfidence in the division of labor within the Godhead. [50] Feenstra notes that 1 Corinthians 14:24-28 suggests that Christ will turn over the rule of the cosmos to the Father, which indicates that the division of labor in this regard is not set in stone. Feenstra goes on to argue that Christ, in a sense, is continuing to rule the world through his redemptive work on earth and that there seems to be little justification for the premise that world-ruling is an essential attribute of divinity.

It could be further asked of the objector "Is it possible for the Father to perform the world governing without the aid of the Son?" If the answer is yes, the critic of kenotic Christology has answered their own objection. If the answer

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46. Hall, *The Kenotic Theory,* 53.

47. Stephen Davis, "Jesus Christ: Saviour or Guru?," in *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (John Knox Press, 1988), https://archive.org/details/encounteringjesu0000unse/page/54/mode/2up , 54.

48. John Cobb, "Jesus Christ: Saviour or Guru?," in *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (John Knox Press, 1988), https://archive.org/details/encounteringjesu0000unse/page/65/mode/2up , 65

49. C. Stephen Evans, "The Self Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God.* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 259.

50. Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 119.

is no, then the implication is that the Father and Son have different essential properties. Additionally, such a response entails that the Trinity has essential properties which the members lack. A "no," response to the above question entails that the Trinity has the property "able to govern the world without need of any person outside itself," but this property would not be held by the Father. This implication would further support the kenotic case to be made in later chapters.

Objections From the Trinity

Another line of attack against kenotic Christology is the claim that it disrupts the life of the Trinity in an unacceptable way. For instance, Ensign McChesney objects along these lines saying that:

> Thomasius held to a self-abdication of the real attributes of the divine nature on the part of the Son of God, and assumed accordingly that the Son was self-excluded from the Trinity during the earthly life of Christ. The Trinity was reduced to a duality.[51]

Similarly, Dorner objects saying:

> If one member of the Trinity for the time of the growth of Christ stoops to mere potentiality, and therefore suspends His preserving and governing activity, the Logos becomes not mutable merely, but also superfluous in reference to the Trinity,

51. Ensign McChesney, "The Kenosis," *The Methodist Review* 80 (January-February, 1898), https://archive.org/details/sim_methodist-review_january-february-1898_80_1/page/100/mode/2up , 100.

> and holds therein a merely casual position, all of which leads to a subordinationism.[52]

These two arguments, though slightly different, argue that kenosis disrupts the Trinity in virtue of Christ relinquishing something essential to the divine nature. Both objectors argue that Christ is no longer divine under a kenotic theory because he lacks a divine attribute or a divine function.

Feenstra notes in addressing this argument that the underlying premise by both objectors is that Christ ceases to be divine. However, this assumes that the properties or functions that Christ gives up in kenosis are essential for deity. This (as already discussed) is a matter of debate. If the trinitarian objection to kenosis stems from the fact that it leaves the Trinity down a member, it is really nothing more than the essential attributes objection discussed above.

There is, however, a trinitarian objection that accuses kenotic Christology of subordinating one of the trinitarian members beneath the others. Under this objection, the issue is not that Christ ceases to be divine, but that he ceases to be co-equal with the other members of the Trinity. Wolfhart Pannenberg objects along these lines saying, "Is not the Son, who had given up his relative divine attributes in the flesh, excluded from the Trinity for this period, since during his humiliation he was apparently not equally God with the Father and the Spirit?"[53]

While Pannenberg is vague on what makes Christ unequal, J. S. Lawton reasons as follows:

> The distinction, in fact, between what is possible for God and what is possible for the Godhead, or the individual Persons of the Trinity, is itself a most startling innovation. To assert that the Son can submit to a distortion of his nature without affecting

52. Isaak Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (T. & T. Clark, 1882), 265-266.

53. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* (Westminster Press, 1968), 311.

> the "Deity" or the other Persons of the Trinity is virtually a denial of the dogma that all three Persons share the same essence and nature, which therefore cannot be divided, or modified in the case of one member of the Trinity.[54]

Lawton is attacking the notion that each person of the Trinity has properties that are not shared by the divine nature. Lawton thinks this entails that all members don't share the divine nature. However, if understood in this way, Lawton's critique falls back into the debate of what the essential attributes of the divine nature are. If omnipotence and the like are not essentially part of the divine nature, then saying "The Father possesses omnipotence, but not the Son" does not entail that a member of the Trinity lacks the divine nature.

However, Feenstra notes that Lawton's objection may be understood along the lines that if there is a property that is essential to the Father, but not to the Son, then they do not share the same essence. The objection would then be that kenotic Christology compromises the idea that all members of the Trinity share the same essence. If this is Lawton's suggestion, Feenstra notes that it can easily be rejected. As discussed above, surely there are at least some properties that the Father has that the Son lacks (Such as being identical to the Father, not being identical to the Son, etc.). To claim that all members of the Trinity must share the same essential properties is to remove any distinction in the Godhead.

Hall uses the Trinity to object to kenotic Christology by virtue of divine functions.[55] Hall does this by drawing on the doctrine of coinherence among the Trinity, which states that there is no action which one member of the Trinity performs that the other members of the Trinity are not involved with. Using this doctrine, Hall reasons as follows,

1. If kenosis is true, coinherence is false.

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54. Lawton, *Conflict in Christology,* 141.

55. Hall, *The Kenotic Theory,* 234-235.

2. Coinherence is true.

3. Therefore, kenosis is false.

Feenstra notes that the kenotic theologian can plausibly object to premise one.[56] Presumably, the action that Christ would be unable to participate in under kenosis is the continued governance and upholding of the world. However, if Christ's time of kenosis is spent working a redemptive plan for all of humanity and the cosmos, it seems that in a very real sense he is still participating in that act of the Trinity.

However, one might very well challenge premise two on biblical grounds. There is little to no biblical justification for the doctrine of coinherence, and at first glance, various passages seem to indicate that the persons of the Trinity perform tasks without the others. Feenstra remarks "Jesus does as the Father has commanded him: the Father is greater than he: Jesus will send the Spirit of truth from the Father; the Spirit's coming is contingent upon Jesus' leaving."[57]

Objections From Immutability

A classic line of attack against kenotic Christology comes from the doctrine of God's immutability, which affirms that God cannot undergo change. Eugene Fairweather displays this strategy in the following quote,

> We must ask, however, whether any ultimately defensible doctrine of the Incarnation could conceivably meet these Kenotic requirements. Certainly the traditional Christology declines to try to meet them, on the grounds of the principle of divine immutability, and as long as that principle stands

56. Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 237-239.

57. Ibid, 238.

> there can be no place for a kenotic doctrine in Christian thought...[since] ascriptions of mutation and composition to God run counter to the eternal changelessness and the perfect simplicity of infinite and transcendent Spirit, in which Christian theology has commonly found the very meaning of deity. [58]

The argument against kenotic Christology from immutability, simply put, is as follows:

1. God is immutable.

2. If kenotic Christology is true, God is not immutable.

3. Therefore, kenosis theology is not true.

Where the defender of kenotic Christology wishes to object in this syllogism depends largely on how strong a view of immutability the objector is using. A strong immutability maintains that absolutely no change can occur in the divine life, while a weak immutability maintains that no change can occur in God's character or essential nature. One who holds to a strong immutability would deny God changes in his relation to the world, or to his creatures, or that he ever gains or loses a property. In contrast, a proponent of a weak immutability can note that God may acquire certain properties (such as being in a covenantal relationship with Abraham) but still maintain God's ethical character or nature does not change. If one holds to a strong view of immutability, premise two is undeniably true, in which case the kenotic theologian must object to premise one. However, if a weak sense of immutability is used, premise one is

58. Eugene Fairweather, "The 'Kenotic' Christology," in *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (Harper & Row, 1959), 170-172.

undeniable, and the kenotic theologian will likely try to find solace in rejecting premise two.

Let us begin by supposing that a weak sense of immutability is used. Hall presents the following argument:

> We have shown that it is unnecessary to hinge our argument against kenoticism upon the truth of Divine immutability. There is, however, no question but that immutability of attributes is an essential truth of the divine nature. To say this is merely to say that God is eternal and therefore can never cease to be God, and this is a revealed truth beyond all question. As has already been shown, to lose Divine attributes is to cease to be God, for that is not God which does not possess the Divine nature, and the Divine nature is that only what possesses all Divine attributes. Kenoticists undoubtedly sacrifice the truth of divine immutability.[59]

In evaluating this argument, Feenstra notes that the implication that kenosis Christology entails the loss of the divine nature assumes that the properties given up by the Son are essential aspects of divinity.[60] If kenotic theologians such as Davis are correct, and properties such as omniscience and omnipotence are not essential to the divine nature, then it is not the case that kenosis violates immutability, as God never ceases to be God. At this point, the debate is no longer about immutability, it is about what the essential attributes of the divine nature are. Similarly, the kenotic theologian does not hold that the Son ceased to be perfectly good.

If one wishes to object to kenosis using a weak view of immutability, it seems that they will be importing assumptions about the essential attributes of the

59. Hall, *The Kenotic Theory,* 233-234.

60. Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 106.

divine nature. If this is the case, then the objection from immutability really falls under the category of objections regarding essential attributes which have already been discussed. This style of argument also utilizes the vague notion that "If X does not exhibit all the attributes of the divine nature, X is not divine." However, as will be discussed in a later chapter, this assumption needs to be rejected, or at least nuanced.

Discussion of divine immutability so far has been restricted to a weak sense of immutability which allows some change in God, but not a change in God's essential nature or character. However, what if one wishes to adopt a strong view of immutability in their objection against kenosis? If God's immutability is understood as God's inability to undergo any change whatsoever, the kenotic theologian can simply reject premise one. Strong immutability has no support in Scripture and is in fact directly contradicted by Scripture. One verse that might be cited by proponents of strong immutability is Malachi 3:6 which says, "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." However, one might just as easily interpret this verse as referencing God's unchanging moral character and steadfastness in his covenantal relationships. This interpretation is to be preferred over strong immutability, as in the very next verse God says, "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." In his commentary on this verse, Pieter Verhoef remarks:

> If the people return to God, then he will surely return to them. This aspect of promise is expressed in the syntactical structure. The cohortative with *waw*-copulative is dependent on the preceding imperative and denotes a consequence: "in order that I may turn to you," or "then I will turn to you." The transgressions of the people were the cause of God's turning away from them, the reason why he was no longer pleased with them (1:8, 10; 2:13). If they repent, he is eager to confirm by his

> own turning to them that he still loves them and that he has not changed in his covenant relationship to them.[61]

Malachi 3:6 thus appears to be a poor candidate for supporting strong immutability, as it is immediately followed by a verse that is inconsistent with strong immutability.

Other potential proof texts for strong immutability are James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change," and Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." However, as with the verse from Malachi, strong immutability is not a concept found in these verses. Rather, strong immutability is being read into these verses. The context of James 1:17 appears to be about God's consistency in his moral character which results in our confidence that he will give us good gifts.

Similarly, there is nothing in Hebrews 13:8 that can be read as conveying strong immutability, and Hebrews 1:3 says regarding Christ that "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." This implies some form of change on the part of Christ, as there was a before and an after he purified sins which entails he gained and lost properties. Hebrews 1:13 has God saying to the Son "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." If there is a moment in which Christ's enemies are not a footstool for his feet, and then another moment when they are, this violates strong immutability. We are told in Hebrews 2:17 that "He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God." There is a change in these verses regarding Christ becoming like his brothers in every respect and regarding Christ becoming a high priest. To insist that Hebrews 13:8 supports strong immutability is to ignore the entirety of the book of Hebrews.

While there is no scriptural support for strong immutability, there seems to be sustained testimony against it. God makes conditional statements such as in

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61. Pieter Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 231.

2 Chronicles 7:14 which says, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." God hearing his people and healing the land implies that God will change in a way that is incompatible with strong immutability.[62]

We are told that the actions of humans can positively and negatively affect God's emotions. Judges 10:16 says that God "became impatient" over the misery of Israel, while Deuteronomy 9:7 describes God as being provoked to wrath. Zechariah 1:15 has God saying, "I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster." If God changed in his level of anger, that constitutes a change inconsistent with strong immutability. In Hosea 11:8, God says that his heart recoils within him, and that his compassion *grows* warm. Psalm 30:5 says that God's anger is "but for a moment." An entire book could be filled discussing examples like the ones above, but this should be sufficient to show that one cannot use strong immutability to reject kenotic Christology, as strong immutability is itself biblically unjustifiable.

Objections that Kenotic Christology is Too Complex

Richard Swinburne objects to a kenotic Christology along three lines. First, Swinburne argues that kenotic Christology is inconsistent with the arguments of natural theology:

> The difficulty with such a theory is that all the arguments to the existence of God are arguments to a simple source of all...to whom omnipotence and omniscience belong essentially; and any being who was divine would have to have the same essential

62. We see similar remarks in Jeremiah 18:8

> properties as such a creator--otherwise he would be less than the creator source of all, and there would be no incarnation of God.[63]

In response to this claim, it is worth noting that the kenotic view of God is not necessarily in conflict with the God derived from natural theology. Rather, it might conflict with Swinburne's personal flavor of natural theology. Various arguments from natural theology don't entail an essentially omnipotent being, but something much more modest. Various formulations of the Kalam Cosmological Argument, Fine Tuning Argument, and Moral Argument don't claim that the resulting deity is one that essentially has these properties.

Swinburne also argues that the kenotic position is less simple, and therefore less desirable, than the view that God essentially has omnipotence and omniscience. Swinburne remarks:

> Could God the Father temporarily abandon the traditional properties at the same time as God the Son and God the Spirit? If so, then there can (metaphysically) be a universe without there being a God in control at that time. If that be admitted, what argument could there be from the universe for supposing that there is a God at all since his control would not be needed to explain its existence, and what reason would there be for believing that God would ever be in control again? And if we suppose that there is some mechanism to ensure that one divine being is always in control, our hypothesis is beginning to become very complicated and for that reason less likely to be true.[64]

63. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 232.

64. Ibid.

Regarding Swinburne's claim that the kenotic theologian commits himself to a complex and therefore less likely to be true model of God, a few issues should be noted. First, Swinburne's claim that any mechanism to ensure one divine being is always in control entails a complex hypothesis is an overstatement. It seems like a kenotic explanation for why one divine being must always be in control is that for all members to abdicate this role would result in a moral wrong, and thus violate their perfection (as was discussed earlier). If the "mechanism" is rooted in perfection, which is a property Swinburne affirms in his model of God, it's hard to see how this adds much complexity.

Second, as Feenstra notes, "Simplicity alone cannot decide the matter... given the depth of mystery surrounding God and our inability to comprehend God fully, one might expect some subtlety and complexity in our understanding of the divine attributes."[65] In a similar spirit, one might be tempted to echo C.S Lewis's words that "The problem is not simple, and the answer is not going to be simpler either."[66]

Objections From Perfection

Andrew Loke, in his work defending a kryptic Christology, attacks kenotic Christology upon its ability to maintain Christ's perfection. Loke begins his attack by saying:

> What follows from standard Ontological Kenoticism is that there is a possible world in which a person P exists and he (like baby Jesus) is no more powerful and no more intelligent than an ordinary human being, and yet P is divine even though P is weaker and less intelligent than many other persons (Moreland and Craig 2003, 607–8). This strains credulity, as most people

65. Ronald Feenstra, "A Kenotic Christology of the Divine Attributes," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Regent College, 2010), 157.

66. Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. (HarperCollins, 2015), 42.

> from diverse cultures and religious persuasions would think that the possession of knowledge, for example, is a good thing, a perfection. There is no state of knowledge which, qua knowledge, is bad or merely neutral in value, and it is precisely because knowledge is almost universally regarded as a good thing that many theologians have derived God's omniscience from the doctrine that his nature is absolutely perfect.[67]

At this junction, Loke's argument depends heavily on his use of perfection (understood in a philosophical sense) and perfect being theism. His argument might reasonably be restated as follows:

1. In order for a person to be divine, they must be perfect.

2. Any lack of knowledge entails a lack of perfection.

3. Under kenoticism, Jesus lacked knowledge.

4. Under kenoticism Jesus lacked perfection.

5. Therefore, under kenoticism, Jesus was not divine.

It's my contention that both premises 1 and 2 can be reasonably rejected by the kenotic theologian. A rejection of premise one is reasonable in light of the fact that Christ's lacking knowledge does not entail that the Trinity lacks knowledge. As a result, even if one believes Christ's kenosis involves a loss of perfection, God as a whole is still perfect. This option will be discussed at length in a later chapter, though it is worth mentioning now as a live option.

Since a rejection of premise 1 will be discussed at length later in this work, our focus will be on premise two. The support for this premise comes from Loke's claim that "There is no state of knowledge which, qua knowledge, is bad

67. Andrew Loke, *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation (Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies)* (Routledge, 2014), 42-43.

or merely neutral in value." This claim does the majority of the heavy lifting in Loke's argument, yet the support offered for it is nothing more than a vague appeal to intuition. This appeal has several issues.

First, believing that knowledge is a good thing is not the same as believing that every specific instance of knowledge is a good thing. Loke's argument rests on the claim that every instance of knowledge has a positive value, yet in support of this claim, he merely notes that almost every culture agrees that knowledge is generally good. This seems to be little more than a bait and switch. As Christians, I suspect we all agree that marriage and sex, being given to us by God, are good things. However, we likely agree that not every instance in which these occur is positive in value. We all know of couples who are in a worse state due to their marriages than if they had remained single, and Scripture makes clear that not every instance of sex is a positive one.

Similarly, if asked whether having a strong and muscular physique is a good thing, we would likely all respond "yes" as strength is intuitively a great-making property, and there is a massive amount of academic literature showing a connection between resistance training and health outcomes. However, this does not mean an increase in muscle mass is *always* of positive value. There may be a point where the increased muscle contributes negatively to one's health. The point of the above remarks is meant only to show that Loke should not take general, non-nuanced statements about knowledge being good and infer from these intuitions that we are therefore justified in asserting that *every* occurrence of knowledge is of positive value.

One might ask at this point if there is reason to object to the claim that all instances of knowledge are intrinsically valuable. It seems that the answer to this question is obviously yes. Suppose that one had a teenage child who has decided that because knowledge is universally recognized as good, they are going to pursue acquiring as much knowledge as possible. This seems at first glance a noble goal and one's pride as a parent would likely swell. However, suppose that the child informed you that they were going to begin their quest by learning what it feels like to skin a cat alive and shortly thereafter they wanted to know what it feels like to rape a small child.

Would we not all agree that the acquisition of this type of knowledge would be to the detriment of the child? Not only does this knowledge fail to make the child better, but it also actively makes them worse. It is worth noting at this junction that I am not claiming that knowledge of this sort is required for God to be omniscient. That is another debate. Rather, the claim at the present moment is that the knowledge being sought by the deranged child is indeed a form of knowledge, and it is not of a positive value. At best, it seems merely neutral.

One might object that the issue with the knowledge being sought by the deranged child is not the knowledge itself, but the actions required to obtain the knowledge. The deranged child would have to perform immoral actions, which would make them overall worse. However, it seems that one can reasonably reject any notion that the only thing objectionable in this scenario is the actions needed to acquire such knowledge.

Suppose that we live in a highly advanced society that has developed the means to perfectly fabricate experiences and memories in a person's mind and to transfer knowledge from one mind to another. Our deranged child can simply go down to the local memory vendor, pay a small fee, and learn what it feels like to perform any depraved act imaginable. Not only can they learn what it feels like to perform the act, they can learn what it feels like to enjoy it, to relish it. My intuition tells me that the child is much worse after his trip to the memory vendor than before. My intuitions tell me that this type of knowledge is of neutral value at best, and most certainly not positive.

It is worth also considering a scenario in which the knowledge acquired is not obviously bad, but the means of obtaining it entail an obvious loss of a good. Suppose a man wanted to substantially increase his knowledge of physics and decides to pursue this knowledge by going to a memory vendor. All he must do is pay a small fee, and the memories of a physics professor can be downloaded into their mind. However, suppose that when making this purchase there is a malfunction, and the man completely loses his ability to empathize with others and no longer has any disposition to financially contribute to charitable causes. The man after the procedure has more propositional knowledge than before,

all the propositional knowledge is good, yet it seems intuitively that he is no better for it. If anything, the small betterment gained from his new knowledge is outweighed by the loss of empathy and charitable disposition.

One might be wondering how all of this relates to Loke's original claim. I propose it does so in two ways. First, contrary to Loke's claim, the deranged child thought experiment indicates that not all knowledge is intrinsically great making. Second, and more important, this odd assortment of thought experiments shows that when discussing knowledge's contribution to greatness, knowledge cannot be considered in a vacuum. It is not merely enough to count the number of true propositions that a person knows. One must also consider the implications of having that knowledge.

With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to the question of God's perfection. Christ's kenotic incarnation entails giving up knowledge of certain truths, which considered in isolation, contribute to his perfection. However, just as in the thought experiments provided above, Christ's new lack of knowledge has implications that must be considered when evaluating his perfection. Let us grant Loke's claim that, in becoming kenotically incarnate, Christ would have lost some intrinsically good knowledge. We must remember that an implication of Christ losing this knowledge is that he would now be able to experience things that he previously could not. Christ can now have firsthand experiences of fear, despair, anguish, uncertainty, loneliness, and depression. As a result of being able to experience firsthand these struggles, Christ can more fully sympathize with us.

We are told in Hebrews 2:17 that the reason that Christ had to become like us in all respects is so that "He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Hebrews 4:15 tells us "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." The author of Hebrews explicitly links Christ's ability to sympathize with our weaknesses with his ability to be a merciful high priest.

If Christ's lack of knowledge is what gives him the ability to sympathize with us, and this sympathy is what qualifies him to be a high priest, then it seems

that Christ's lack of knowledge in no way degrades his perfection. Does Christ's ability to serve as our merciful high priest, and his act of doing so, not contribute to his greatness? It seems obvious to me that it does. It would be foolish to suggest that the contribution to Christ's greatness which comes from his role as a merciful high priest is outweighed by his inability to know how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

There is no doubt that Loke would object to such a strong reading of comments in Hebrews about Christ's ability to sympathize with us, as Loke makes quite clear that he does not view kenosis as necessary for Christ's saving for work. This topic will be tackled at greater length in a later chapter, but for the present moment it can simply be noted that even if Loke is right that this strong sense of sympathy is unneeded for Christ's saving work, it is still obvious to my intuition that a Christ who can sympathize in this way while lacking knowledge is no less perfect than a Christ who can't sympathize in this way but knows everything. I am tempted to go even further and say that the very willingness of Christ to empty himself in this way speaks of a greatness that far outweighs whatever greatness comes from mere propositional knowledge. Even if Loke is right that it wasn't *necessary* for Christ to empty himself in this way, Christ coming alongside us and fully sharing our limitations in this way would constitute an act of love and camaraderie that is far greater than all of the propositional knowledge in the world. Loke seems to have missed the central message of Philippians 2, which is that greatness does not arise from clinging to the privileges you already have. Rather, greatness comes from being willing to give those privileges up for others. It is also worth noting that Hebrews 5 describes Christ as being made perfect through his suffering on earth, so if Loke wants to double down on this perfection objection, he has his work cut out for him.

Objections From Christ's Exaltation

Another line of objection against kenotic Christology comes from the nature of the exalted Christ. Hall remarks:

> The a priori assumption that certain Divine attributes are incompatible with the limitations of human nature, if valid against their co-existence in Christ's person while He was on earth, is also valid against their union now. The knowledge of our Lord's human mind is still finite, and if such a limitation excluded omniscience while He was on earth, it does so now.[68]

This objection is that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If the kenotic theologian insists that kenosis is required for Christ to be truly human, this entails that when Christ regains the attributes in question, he is no longer human.

The degree to which this objection affects the kenotic theologian is contingent upon how kenotic Christology is argued for. Consider the following quote from Davis:

> At any point in his earthly ministry, I suspect, Jesus could have called on his omniscience (or omnipotence, for that matter - see Matthew 26:53), but had he done so, it would have been tantamount to his no longer being truly human. He would no longer have shared our human lot, which it was his intention to do. An omniscient being, he freely decided temporarily to abandon his omniscience and live only by what he could learn as a man and by what was revealed to him by the Father.[69]

Davis seems to imply that a lack of the emptied attribute is essential for Christ to be truly human. If this is the case, Hall is quite right to point out an inconsistency in the kenotic position. If one believes that kenosis is required

68. Hall, *The Kenotic Theory*, 238.

69. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, 126.

for Christ to be truly human, how might one defend against this objection? Feenstra notes that this charge might be met by holding that kenosis is required for becoming incarnate, but not for being incarnate. Put differently, the process of going from non-incarnate to incarnate might require a kenosis of these attributes, but once embodied, these attributes could be held in a human. Feenstra notes that "Many might dismiss this premise as part of a futile and contrived attempt to rescue kenotic theology."[70] However, he thinks that it is an option worth considering.

Evans regards this response as problematic. If it is possible to be embodied and truly human while possessing these attributes, it is difficult to see why it would be impossible to become incarnate without giving them up.[71] While Evans sees this option as problematic, he thinks there is a plausible view in a similar line that one might take as a response. Evans notes that the body which Christ has after his resurrection is not like the body he had before his resurrection. The new body is the perfected resurrected body, and it might very well be the case that this perfected body does not have the same limitations as a normal body.

In the arguments previously noted regarding the exaltation of Christ, both critics and proponents of kenotic Christology have taken for granted that the glorified Christ has the properties of omniscience and omnipotence, though Evans thinks that one might rightfully question this claim.[72] Evans notes that the biblical data leaves open the question of whether Christ's exalted state involves omnipotence and omniscience. Hebrews 2:17 implies that Christ's role of high priest is an ongoing role and that it was because of Christ's role as high priest that he must be made like men in all respects. Evans also notes that the language of Hebrews 2:9 and Philippians 2 indicates that Christ's exaltation was something that was bestowed upon him for his obedience, not something he just

70. Feenstra, "Pre-Existence, Kenosis, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 165.

71. Evans, "The Self Emptying of Love," 265.

72. Ibid, 267.

innately had as deity. Evans summarizes the options of the kenotic theologian as follows:

> One may argue that the ascended Christ is omniscient and omnipotent and that this is quite consistent with his emptying himself of those qualities to become incarnate. Kenosis is not necessary for incarnation, but is necessary either to become incarnate in our present type of body or necessary only for other redemptive purposes. Alternatively, the kenotic theorist may hold that the ascended Christ, though glorified and exalted in ways we do not fully understand, has received whatever supernatural power and insight he possesses from the Father. The self-emptying of the incarnation is not in this case a temporary loss but an irrevocable decision that is rewarded by God with glory and provides us with a model of our own intended destiny.[73]

It is the belief of the present author that it is a mistake to argue for kenosis on the premise that Christ could not be truly human unless he lacks certain properties. There is no way, philosophically or biblically, to support the idea that non-omnipotence or non-omniscience are essential attributes of humanity. The proper position is not that kenosis was required for incarnation, but that kenosis was required for the redemptive work that Christ came to complete.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we surveyed a variety of objections to kenotic Christology. In doing this, we saw that many of these objections stem from competing claims about God's essential attributes. Objectors claim that attributes such

73. Ibid.

as omnipotence and omniscience are essential to God, while proponents of kenotic Christology often claim they are not. In the next chapter, I will show how a proponent of kenotic Christology can respond to these objections while granting that omnipotence and omniscience are essential attributes of God.

Chapter Two

An Argument From Trinity Monotheism

Introduction

In this chapter, a model will be given under which a proponent of kenotic Christology can avoid the previously discussed objections relating to God's essential attributes. I will begin my case with an argument that I hope everybody can agree is terrible. In beginning with a terrible argument, I hope to draw out some common mistakes that occur in discussions regarding kenotic Christology. With that said, let's begin with the following deductive argument which I will refer to as the Bad Trinity Argument (BTA):

1. God is three persons

2. Jesus is God

3. Therefore, Jesus is three persons.

If this argument is sound, Christians are in a pickle. A great ruckus has been made throughout Christian history to deny that Jesus is two persons. Alas, we have here an argument which concludes that he is actually three persons!

Additionally, if this argument is successful for Jesus, we could formulate a similar argument regarding the Father and the Holy Spirit. As a result, the Godhead would start to look pretty crowded. Luckily, this argument is (as Alvin Plantinga might say) "about as imperforate as an afghan knit by an elephant."[1] The argument fails because it is a textbook case of an equivocation fallacy. The terms in the first and second premises are being used in different ways, and the argument is taking advantage of this semantic ambiguity. This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Now consider the following argument, which I will refer to as the Bad Kenotic Argument (BKA):

1. God is essentially omnipotent and omniscient
2. Jesus is God.
3. Therefore, Jesus is essentially omnipotent and omnipotent
4. Kenotic Christology entails that Jesus is not essentially omnipotent and omniscient
5. Therefore, kenotic Christology is false.

This argument seems to be an accurate representation of the essential attributes argument discussed in the first chapter. However, it is my contention that premises 1-3 in the BKA are fallacious for the same reasons that the BTA is fallacious. Specifically, both arguments equivocate terms and utilize semantic ambiguity of the phrase "is God." Additionally, both arguments wrongly assume that any property attributed to the Trinity must also apply to any person in the Trinity.

In this chapter, I will develop this critique by drawing on Trinity Monotheism as a model for understanding the Trinity. I will begin by outlining

1. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 1974), 17.

Trinity Monotheism as it has been articulated by William Lane Craig and ways in which it has been strengthened by Andrew Kirschner. After Trinity Monotheism has been presented, I will explore how this model can provide a response to arguments similar to the BKA.

Preliminary Remarks Regarding "Is"

Before our discussion of Trinity Monotheism can begin, a few preliminary remarks are needed regarding different uses of the word "is." Sometimes, "is" can be used to represent identity. For example, one might say that "Batman is Bruce Wayne" to mean that Batman is the same person as Bruce Wayne. Similarly, one might say that "Water is H2O" to mean that water is identical to a certain chemical structure. Identity, understood in this way, has strong implications. If X is identical to Y, anything that is true of X must also be true of Y. If we discover that there is something true of X that is not true of Y, this entails that X is not identical to Y. For example, suppose I said "The person who knocked on my door at midnight last night is identical to the forty-sixth president of the U.S." This sounds like the beginning of an interesting story, but your interest would probably be crushed if I proceeded to say, "She was 5'2, Latino, and roughly 36 years old." The reason this would lose your interest is because you know that the forty-sixth U.S president has certain properties such as being old, white, and male. Because there are things true of the person who knocked at my door that are not true of the current president, you can quickly recognize they are not identical. When "is" appears in a sense conveying identity, it would make no sense to say something like "James is the current U.S President, Zach is the current U.S President, but James is not Zach."

However, "is" does not always convey a meaning of identity. Sometimes "is" can be used to describe an object as having certain properties. For example, one might say "James is bald." In this statement, the speaker is not ascribing identity, they are simply ascribing predication. One can make a statement such as "James is bald, William is bald, but James is not William," because "is" in this

statement is being used to predicate certain properties to James and William, it's not suggesting that anything true of "bald" is also true of James.

With this distinction of "is" in mind, we can easily see what went wrong in the BTA. When God is said to be three persons in the first premise, its clear that "God" is being used to represent the entire Godhead (the Trinity). However, when we see "Jesus is God" in the second premise, it seems that "is" has been used to identify Jesus with the "God" just mentioned in the first premise. If we restate our second premise in a way that avoids the unstated ambiguity of "is" and "God," we see that the innocent-looking "Jesus is God" was really expressing "Jesus is identical to the Trinity." However, this is false. Thus, the BTA appeared reasonable only because of semantic ambiguity and equivocation in its terms.

Trinity Monotheism as a Model of the Trinity

With these preliminary remarks made, let us turn our discussion towards Trinity Monotheism. William Lane Craig states that Trinity Monotheism "holds that while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole which is properly God."[2] Under Trinity Monotheism, God is identical to the Trinity. Craig explains:

> [Trinity Monotheism] asserts that there is more than one way to be divine. The persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of exemplifying the divine nature. For presumably being triune is a property of the divine nature (God does not just happen to be triune); yet the persons of the Trinity do not exemplify that property. It now becomes clear that the reason that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature is that there are no other instances of the divine nature. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not instances of the divine nature, and that is

2. William Lane Craig and J.P Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd (IVP Academic, 2017), 588.

> why there are not three Gods. The Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature, and therefore there is but one God. So while the statement "The Trinity is God" is an identity statement, statements about the persons like "The Father is God" are not identity statements. Rather they perform other functions, such as ascribing a title or office to a person (like "Belshazzar is King," which is not incompatible with there being co-regents) or ascribing a property to a person (a way of saying, "The Father is divine," as one might say, "Belshazzar is regal").[3]

In this quote, "divine nature" is being used in reference to the properties held by the Trinity as a whole. However, one might wonder how the persons of the Trinity are divine if they don't exhibit the divine nature. Craig posits that:

> We could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God... Given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seems undeniable that there is some sort of part/whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.[4]

In teasing out his position that persons can be regarded as divine based on the part/whole relation they stand in, Craig uses the example that "One way of being feline is to exemplify the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat."[5]

The remarks thus far leave open the question of how we are to conceive of this part/whole relation, and one might reasonably wonder what makes these three

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3. Ibid, 589.

4. Ibid, 590.

5. Ibid.

persons one God. To answer this question, Craig offers the following thought experiment:

> Perhaps we can get a start at this question by means of an analogy. (There is no reason to think that there must be any analogy to the Trinity among created things, but analogies may prove helpful as a springboard for philosophical reflection and formulation.) In Greco-Roman mythology there is said to stand guarding the gates of Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. We may suppose that Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness of whatever it is like to be a dog. Therefore, Cerberus, while a sentient being, does not have a unified consciousness. He has three consciousnesses. We could even assign proper names to each of them: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. These centers of consciousness are entirely discrete and might well come into conflict with one another. Still, in order for Cerberus to be biologically viable, not to mention in order to function effectively as a guard dog, there must be a considerable degree of cooperation among Rover, Bowser, and Spike. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is a single biological organism exemplifying a canine nature. Rover, Bowser, and Spike may be said to be canine, too, though they are not three dogs, but parts of the one dog Cerberus. If Hercules were attempting to enter Hades, and Spike snarled at him or bit his leg, he might well report, "Cerberus snarled at me" or "Cerberus attacked me." ...We can enhance the Cerberus story by investing him with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case Rover, Bowser, and Spike are plausibly personal agents and Cerberus a tri-personal being. Now if we were asked what makes Cerberus a single being despite his multiple minds, we should doubtless reply that it is because he has a single physical

> body. But suppose Cerberus were to be killed, and his minds survive the death of his body. In what sense would they still be one being? How would they differ intrinsically from three exactly similar minds which have always been unembodied? [6]

Craig goes on to suggest that the recently deceased minds of Cerberus would still be parts of the same soul, which is why they could still be referred to as one dog. Craig continues,

> Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and volition, as Social Trinitarians maintain. God would clearly not be three discrete souls because the cognitive faculties in question are all faculties belonging to just one soul, one immaterial substance. God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings each support one person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula "three persons in one substance."[7]

Strengthening Craig's Model

In Craig's formulation of Trinity Monotheism, he remains uncommitted to any particular mereological position. Craig remarks that "whether the persons mentioned in the model ought to be characterized as parts of God is really quite

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6. Ibid, 592.

7. Ibid, 592-93.

incidental to the proposal and may be left to mereologists to decide"[8] and "The model is what it is regardless of how we decide the mereological question."[9] Andrew Kirschner, however, has sought to strengthen Craig's proposal by use of the mereological thesis called "Composition as Identity" (CAI). Kirschner begins his exposition with a helpful thought experiment:

> Often ordinary objects have parts. Mallets, for example, have a handle and a head as parts. The simple analysis that ordinary objects have parts opens the door to a variety of philosophical issues. Suppose the mallet in question is comprised of only two parts—the handle and the head—and is the only physical object in the world. How many physical objects are there in this world? Some may be inclined to say one as there is just one mallet. But the mallet is composed of a handle and a head. So it seems that the handle and head must be counted, too. Does this mean there are three things? Three does not seem right. There is one mallet, which is comprised to two parts (a handle and a head), but to say that three things exist seems to count something twice.[10]

In evaluating this conundrum, Kirschner surveys several options. First, one might maintain that the mallet is a distinct object from the head and handle. However, this has two issues. First, under such an understanding, we have co-location of material objects.[11] The head and handle (taken together) always occupy the exact same area of space as the mallet, which at first

8. William Lane Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder.," *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006), 1.

9. Ibid, 8.

10. Andrew Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism: A Defense of the Logical Coherence of, A Priori Motivation for, and a Particular Model Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 2019), 24.

11. Ibid, 25.

glance seems weird. One might also think that there are problems with causal overdetermination if we think of the handle and head collectively as something distinct from the mallet.[12] For instance, suppose you throw the mallet at a window causing the glass to shatter, and afterwards begin to reflect on what caused the window to break. It seems like one would have to say that the mallet caused the window to break, but also that the head and handle collectively caused the window to break. Thus, for any normal instance of a cause producing an effect, that effect is heavily overdetermined. One might resign oneself to saying that the head and handle are the only objects, but then Kirschner asks "What happened to the mallet?"[13] This would imply that there are no such things as phones, mallets, houses, etc., which is contrary to our everyday language and intuitions.

For Kirschner, this is where the thesis of Composition as Identity (CAI) comes into play.[14] CAI can be understood as "The thesis that a whole and all its parts collective is the same thing under two different modes of presentation."[15] Under CAI, the head and handle collectively are identical to the mallet. This thesis solves several of the oddities previously presented. Consider the issue of co-locating material objects. Megan Wallace notes that "Co-location of parts and wholes is no more of a problem on this view than co-location is a problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to co-locate."[16] Regarding the issue of overdetermination, it is "No more a problem than overdetermination is a

12. Ibid, 27.

13. Ibid.

14. CAI is not an uncontroversial mereological position. For objections to CAI and responses, see Kirschner, 27-44.

15. E. Bohn, "Unrestricted Composition as Identity," in *Composition as Identity*, ed. D. Baxter and A. Cotnoir (Oxford University Press., 2014), 143.

16. Megan Wallace, "Composition as Identity Part 1," *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 11 (2011): 805.

problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to overdetermine anything."[17]

In addition to solving everyday mereological puzzles, Kirschner sees CAI as playing a positive role in explaining how Christians can conceive of one God and three divine persons.[18] Kirschner suggests that:

> The one God is the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) are the one God. The one God is composed of the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) compose the one God. The three persons are distinct divine persons, but it is not the case that each person individually/distributively is identical with God.[19]

Kirschner maintains that such an understanding can help Christians respond to the accusation that "Trinitarian Christians are having trouble counting: they need 3 to equal 1."[20] In making his argument, Kirschner considers the Athanasian Creed:

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17. Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism," 27.

18. One might be reluctant of using compositional language regarding God because compositional language entails that the parts can exist prior to, or apart from, the whole. However, I see no reason to think that God being composed of three persons entails that those persons can exist apart from each other. It seems like one can hold that God is composed of three persons and that none of those persons can existapart from the others. The three persons exist eternally and necessarily and thus saying that they compose God does not entail that God lacks eternality or necessity. For example, consider a necessarily existing triangle which is composed of three sides. The fact that the three sides compose the triangle doesn't contradict the statement that the triangle exists necessarily so long as each side exists necessarily.

19. Ibid, 39.

20. Shieva Kleinschmidt, "Many-One Identity and the Trinity," *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion,* 4 (2012): 84.

> The Father is uncreated; the Son is uncreated; and the Holy Spirit is uncreated. And yet there are not three uncreated, but one uncreated. The Father is unlimited; the Son is unlimited; and the Holy Spirit is unlimited. And yet there are not three infinites, but one infinite. The Father is eternal; the Son is eternal; and the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. Father is Almighty; the Son is Almighty; and the Holy Spirit is Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; and the Holy Spirit is Lord. And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord. We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.[21]

These statements follow a consistent pattern of "The Father is X, the Son is X, the Holy Spirit is X, and yet there are not three Xs, but one X."[22] Since the creed also maintains the distinction of the persons, Kirschner argues that this pattern indicates that "is" should be understood as conveying predication and not identity. Kirschner remarks that if one is "to be charitable at all to the authors of the creeds, then one should look for a way to preserve the coherence of what they affirm. To do otherwise is to beg the question against the logic of creedal affirmations."[23]

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21. Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism," 40.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid, 49.

In addition to the above creedal example, Kirschner illustrates his position by asking us to imagine a wall that is composed of three bricks.[24] Incorporating CAI, the three bricks taken collectively are identical to the wall. Now suppose that each of the bricks has the property of being red. If one were to ask how many red things are present, two plausible answers could be given. One might be tempted to say that there are three red things present because of the three bricks. However, one might also reasonably reply that there is only one red thing, the wall. The correct answer depends on what one is counting. If one is counting bricks, the correct answer is three. However, if one is counting walls, the correct answer is one. This is referred to as relative counting, which Kirschner describes as the position that "A person cannot determine how many things there are until she has been given a sortal (a concept or kind) under which to count by."[25] In regard to God, one can say "God is Unity when counting 'gods.' God is Trinity when counting 'persons.'"[26]

Defending Trinity Monotheism

While an extensive defense of trinity Monotheism is outside of the scope of this work, it is worth considering a few objections to the model. Beau Branson objects to Craig's understanding of the Trinity from a variety of angles, including the charge that it contradicts scripture. Branson argues:

> Colossians 2:9 says, "In [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The Greek "theotes" ("Godhead") means precisely the divine nature. Greek distinguishes between "theos" (a god), and "theios" (divine). But theotes is the abstract form of theos, not theios. It isn't "divine-ish-ness." It's

24. Ibid, 41-42.

25. Ibid, 35.

26. Ibid, 52.

> god-hood. Craig himself makes a parallel point about John 1:1 (39–40)...Ultimately Craig, no less than Tuggy, must reject the straightforward readings of Colossians 2:9, John 1:1, and the like.[27]

This passage is a common citation when objecting to Trinity Monotheism, and for good reason. At first glance, it seems to be a decisive refutation. Trinity Monotheists say that the Son is part of God because he is part of the Trinity. If this is the case, only a part of God dwelled in Jesus. However, Paul said the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus. Case closed, right?

Unfortunately, this logic will likely end up cutting against any trinitarian, not just the Trinity Monotheist. We might ask the objector, "Did the Father become incarnate, or was it just the Son?" Most Christians will surely want to say that it is the Son who becomes incarnate and not the Father. However, notice the bind that the objector has created for themself. We could now turn this passage around and apply it to our objector with equal zeal. If they deny that the Father became incarnate, how is it that the fullness of God dwelt in Christ? I suspect our objector will have a difficult time creating a response that cannot be equally employed by the proponent of Trinity Monotheism

Thus far, I have not offered a solution to the proposed problem. I have only pointed out that this problem will likely be shared by my objector. On behalf of all Trinitarians, I will seek to provide an answer. Let us begin by looking at the Greek word for "deity," which Branson has drawn to our attention. It may be that Branson has put too many eggs in one basket when appealing to the distinction between "theotes" and "theios," as biblical scholars have argued that these words were used interchangeably during Paul's time. As Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke note:

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27. Beau Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), kindle loc. 4220.

> Of great significance is an investigation by H. S. Nash of the two expressions *theotēs* and *theiotēs*. He put together a rich variety of sources that demonstrate that both substantives were used almost synonymously until far beyond Paul's time. H. S. Nash (p. 16) summarizes, "The history of the interpretation, roughly divided, falls into two periods: the Patristic period, and what may be called, by a stretch of terms, the Greek renaissance of the ninth to the twelfth centuries. In the first period, I have not found a single exegetical support for the tradition (that is the conventional exegetical differentiation between the two concepts, H.B.)[28]

The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG) seems to share this view, listing Colossians 2:9 under its entry for both *theiotēs* and *theotēs*. BDAG offers a meaning for these words as "the quality or characteristic(s) pert. to deity, divinity, divine nature, divineness"[29] and "the state of being god, divine character/nature, deity, divinity, used as abstract noun for θεός,"[30] respectively. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* lists "divinity" as a gloss and says regarding Colossians 2:9:

> It occurs only once in the NT, Col. 2:9... The Εἷς θεός of the OT has attracted to Himself all divine power in the cosmos, and on

28. Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2008), 363.

29. Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, and W.F Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F.W Gingrich (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 446.

30. Ibid, 452.

> the early Christian view He has given this fulness of power to Christ as the Bearer of the divine office.[31]

Eduard Lohse in his commentary maintains a distinction between the terms, but not in a way that would support Branson's contention. Lohse notes:

> The term "deity" (θεότης) should be distinguished from "divine nature" (θειότης). The term "divine nature" (θειότης) describes the character of God, divinity. The term "deity" (θεότης) describes the quality of being divine. Since the words "fulness" and "to be filled" (πληροῦσθαι) are stressed so emphatically, they must have been key concepts in the "philosophy." Where is the fulness to be found? And how does man attain and participate in it so that he is suffused by divine power? Col answers these questions with the polemical assertion: The entire fulness of deity dwells in Christ. Therefore, only that person can be filled who belongs to this Lord—only he who is in him, who has died with him, and has been raised to new life "with Christ" (σὺν Χριστῷ). Under no circumstances whatsoever can entrance to the "fulness" be attained by submissive worship of the "elements of the universe" and fearful observance of their "regulations" (δόγματα).[32]

Lohse remarks in a footnote:

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31. Gerhard Kittel and Friedrich Gerhard, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 3, pg. 119.

32. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Fortress Press, 1971), 100.

> The word "deity," which is only used here in the NT, is frequently attested in Hellenistic literature. Cf., e.g., Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 10 (p. 415b, c): "Even so from men into heroes and from heroes into demigods better souls obtain their transmutation. But from the demigods a few souls still, in the long reach of time, because of supreme excellence, come, after being purified, to share completely in deity[33]

If this word is being used in Greek literature to refer to what humans can become, it seems unwise for Branson to put too much weight on this as an argument.

It seems clear that Branson's exegetical argument crumbles under the slightest examination. Branson wished to assure us that this word couldn't mean divinity and that it must mean the divine nature. Yet that does not appear to be the case. It also must be noted that Branson seems to be importing modern conceptions of the "divine nature" into his argument. In modern theological discussions, "divine nature" seems to be a stand-in phrase that represents all of the properties (or essential properties) possessed by the one true God. However, that is not how this concept was understood in the ancient world. Peter tells us that as believers we will partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), yet surely nobody wants to interpret that passage as meaning we will have all the properties of YHWH.

Setting that issue aside, let us now return to Colossians 2:9. We have seen that this phrase is very much compatible with an understanding of "divinity" or "divineness." What then is supposed to be the issue for Trinity Monotheists? Trinity Monotheists affirm that the divine soul of YHWH dwelt in Jesus through the indwelling of the Son. How does this not meet the standard for the fullness of divinity? When the Son dwelt in Christ, it was not some diminished divinity like one might find in a gnostic emanation. Nor was this the divinity of some Greek demigod or exalted hero. This was the presence of the one most

33. Ibid.

high God who was revealed through the works of Jesus. As Craig Keener notes "Whatever precise sense Paul means by 'fullness,' he clearly means that access to all that God is and does is available only through Christ, a function ancient Judaism often attributed to divine Wisdom."[34]

I will end our discussion on this passage by noting that the solution to this puzzle might be simpler than I have let on. Trinitarians of all stripes will likely want to affirm that the fullness of God dwelt bodily in Christ without also affirming that the Father became incarnate. Solving this riddle might be as simple as recalling the words of our Lord:

> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. [35]

Trinitarians of all stripes can note that although the Father did not become incarnate, he nonetheless dwelt in the Son in some way. Trinity Monotheism provides a useful lens for how this indwelling might work. The Father and Son, though distinct minds, are of the same soul and thus share a mutual indwelling. Biblical objections to Trinity Monotheism will thus need to be found elsewhere.

However, Branson's critique of Craig contains more than a solitary biblical proof text. Branson also voices concern that such a model leads to the existence of too many gods. Branson argues regarding Craig's model:

> Although there's a sense in which there is only "one God" (the Trinity) there's also a sense in which there are three gods (the

34. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, second (IVP Academic, 2014), 574.

35. John 14:10–11.

> persons). And we can't downplay that sense—it's the only sense in which the Father, Son, or Spirit "is God." So, to the extent that there's any good sense in which each "is God," there's a good sense in which there are three Gods.[36]

Branson thinks this is a problem, but I believe a Trinity Monotheist can reasonably respond by asking, "So what?" It seems insignificant whether Trinity Monotheism entails that there are three Gods *in some sense*. What matters is whether Trinity Monotheism entails that there are three Gods in a biblically problematic sense. Branson has not yet shown that this is the case. As I have argued elsewhere,[37] the Old Testament affirms the existence of other gods *in some sense*, though not in a sense that Christians should find problematic. Similarly, Athanasius famously remarked regarding the Son that "He was incarnate that we might be made god."[38] If Athanasius didn't have a problem with us being a god *in some sense*, why should Branson?

More importantly, if the Bible doesn't depict an issue with there being multiple gods *in some sense*, why should a biblically committed Christian care? It seems likely that most models of the Trinity will entail that there are three gods *in some sense* if one sets the conditions for a god broad enough. However, whether a model entails that there are three gods according to the criteria of a particular twenty-first-century theologian seems largely irrelevant to the strength of the model. The charge of "polytheism" in Trinitarian debates seems to be an instance of the bark being worse than the bite.

Branson continues to attack Trinity Monotheism by citing its implications to God's aseity. Branson argues:

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36. Beau Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," kindle loc. 4229.

37. James Agnew, *The Devil's Disharment: Exploring Christ's Victory In The Divine Council* (self-pub., Amazon Kindle, 2024).

38. John Behr, trans., *On the Incarnation: Saint Athanasius The Great of Alexandria*, Popular Patristics Series (St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2011), 71.

> Either the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each a se—but God isn't; God is a se—but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit aren't; or all four—the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and God—are a se. But the first option contradicts the unassailable view that God is a se, and the second contradicts Craig's own view that the Son and Spirit must be a se to be "fully divine."[39]

Branson goes on to note that Craig supports the third option, which is that every person of the Trinity is a se, and the Trinity is also a se. Branson objects to this by saying that if this is the case, then we have four beings that are God in the sense of being the ultimate source of everything except itself.[40] However, this simply does not logically follow. Branson seems to define an entity as being an ultimate source if the being in question is the source of everything that is not itself.[41] However, being an ultimate source (in the way that Branson has defined it) is not what the word aseity means. Consider the following definition by Ryan Mullins, "Aseity: A being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything external."[42] Aseity has to do with whether the being in question depends on anything external to itself for existence. Aseity is not about whether the being in question causes all things external to itself.

Once this distinction is made, we find that the exact opposite of what Branson has concluded is true. If the Father exists a se, that means that the Son does not cause the Father to exist. By the definition Branson has provided for an

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39. Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," kindle loc. 4238.

40. Ibid, kindle loc. 4245.

41. Beau Branson, "God and His Word and His Spirit Are One God," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), kindle loc. 1629.

42. Ryan Mullins, *From Divine Timemaker to Divine Watchmaker: An Exploration of God's Temporality*, Routledge Studies in Analytic and Systematic Theology (Routledge, 2024), 8.

ultimate source, the Son is therefore not an ultimate source (since he does not cause the Father). Similarly, if the Son exists a se, that means that the Father is not an ultimate source (since he does not cause the Son). Put simply, if each member of the Trinity exists a se, it seems impossible for any member of the Trinity to be the ultimate source (as Branson has defined it). No member of the Trinity is the cause of the other members of the Trinity, and thus they are not ultimate sources (as defined by Branson). However, the Trinity is the cause of everything that exists external to itself. Thus, it seems like the Trinity Monotheist can preserve the desired piece of data that there is only one thing that is the ultimate source of things external to itself, and that is the Trinity.

It is also worth noting that while Craig may affirm that all persons of the Trinity are a se, one need not agree with Craig on this point to affirm Trinity Monotheism. A proponent of Trinity Monotheism could affirm that only the Father is a se, and that the Father eternally grounds the Son and Spirit. Or a proponent of Trinity Monotheism could maintain that there is some type of mutual dependence amongst the members of the Trinity. In summary, we have options.

Branson objects that Trinity Monotheism denies that any person of the Trinity has the divine nature saying:

> What's worse, in Socialist Trinitarianism, the "divine" persons don't even have the divine nature either! "From him who has not, even what he has shall be taken away." Now no divine person is identical to God, and no divine person even has the divine nature. Apparently no divine person is "God" in any but an analogical sense.[43]

For this objection to have any sort of force, Branson must clarify what he means by "divine nature." This term, despite being constantly invoked in

43. Beau Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," kindle loc. 4343.

Trinitarian debates, is rarely defined by those who seek to use its power. Is "divine nature" referring to the set of properties that a person must possess to be considered divine? If this is its meaning, then every person of the Trinity does possess the divine nature because each person stands in a part/whole relationship with the Trinity. Does "divine nature" refer to the set of properties that God essentially has? If so, and "God" is in reference to the Trinity (as the Trinity Monotheist will insist), then this objection becomes "Social Trinitarianism entails that none of the persons have all the properties that the Trinity has!" This is of course true, but completely trivial. Why should anybody be bothered about this implication? The supposed lack of the divine nature by the trinitarian persons can only be an issue if "divine nature" is defined in a way that makes its absence problematic. Branson has not done this.

Dale Tuggy has objected to Craig's understanding of Trinity Monotheism by citing both philosophical and biblical issues. Regarding philosophical issues, Tuggy argues that multiple minds sufficient for personhood in God would merely entail the overdetermination of God being a person, not that God is three persons. Tuggy remarks:

> If this soul has three cognitive faculties, each of which is "sufficient for personhood" (i.e., sufficient to make that soul a person), then that soul is overdetermined to be a person! And yet Craig clearly intends to be in the three-self or "social" Trinitarian camp...consider a sci-fi scenario where a man gets some cognitive upgrades. Since he has a large derriere, he decides to put it to good use, and has a donated brain installed in the left cheek, and another in the right. He now has to be careful how he sits, but it's worth it, since each of these brains gives him another set of cognitive capacities. Of course, it is not a brain which thinks, but rather the person whose brain it is, using the brain. Now, he can use three brains at once. But this doesn't make him three persons! Rather, he's just one, one who is over-determined

> to be a person; even if he lost any two of the brains, he'd still be a person, for any one would be sufficient.[44]

This line of argument is mistaken, as the additional persons would not entail that God is overdetermined to be *a person*, but that God is overdetermined to be *personal*. As Craig rightly remarks:

> The key to understanding Tuggy's criticism is the notion of overdetermination. In cases of causal overdetermination two separate causes are alleged to be each sufficient to bring about a single effect, for example, two matches' simultaneously lighting a single candle. But in the case at hand, there is no causal overdetermination. For each set of rational faculties is sufficient for being a person, but not for being the same person. Tuggy's illustration of the man with three brains perfectly illustrates the point. He would be three distinct persons. In fact, in the case of Siamese twins, we do have two persons, not one, each with a distinct self-consciousness, will, and intentionality. The model holds that God is too richly endowed to be a person but is rather three persons. If, per impossible, God lost two sets of his rational faculties, then Tuggy is right that God would, indeed, be a person; but if he lost only one set, he would be bipersonal.[45]

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44. Dale Tuggy, "Changing the Subject, Cognitive Faculties, and 'God,'" in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), kindle loc. 4501.

45. William Lane Craig, "In Defense of Biblical Trinitarianism," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), kindle loc. 6385.

Tuggy also offers the biblical objection that the Father is identified as God throughout the New Testament. Tuggy remarks "The NT clearly teaches and everywhere assumes that the one god is none other than the Father himself. The one called "Yahweh" in the Old Testament turns out to be "God the Father" in the NT."[46] While it is true that the New Testament usually reserves the label "God" for the Father, this argument fails to recognize that other methods are used in the New Testament to identify Jesus with the God of Israel. For instance, in John 8:58 when Jesus is questioned about his age he says "Before Abraham was, I am." In saying this, Jesus applies the divine name (I am) to himself. This communicates that Jesus understood himself as sharing in the divine identity of YHWH. This implication was not lost on the Jews who responded by trying to stone him.

In the beginning of Mark's gospel, Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 are referenced in connection with John the Baptist. Both of these passages mention a messenger who prepares the way for the coming of YHWH. The clear implication of this reference is that the messenger in these texts is John the Baptist and the person whose way he is preparing is Jesus. If this connection is correct, then the very opening of Mark's gospel contains a statement about Jesus being YHWH.

Finally, New Testament authors regularly apply Old Testament texts about YHWH to Christ. As Craig explains:

> The promise, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9) is vouchsafed by the proof text "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). Salvation is from the Lord alone. Unless Jesus is fully divine, then the assurance that everyone who calls upon Yahweh

46. Tuggy, "Changing the Subject," kindle loc. 4532.

> will be saved would not ratify the promise that everyone who calls upon Jesus will be saved.[47]

Why should more weight be given to the label "God" than to instances such as these which clearly indicate that Jesus was considered as being YHWH? YHWH is of course the one true God, so any instance that connects YHWH and Jesus in this way defeats the popular claim that the New Testament identifies God only with the Father.

Several other potential objections to Trinity Monotheism are worth addressing at this point. It seems common for opponents of Trinity Monotheism to object upon the grounds that Trinity Monotheism entails that Jesus is not fully God. Whether or not this objection is true depends on what is meant by "is fully God." If one uses this phrase to mean that Jesus is fully identical to God, and "God" is in reference to the Trinity, then it is true that Trinity Monotheism entails that Jesus is not fully God *in that sense*. However, nobody should affirm that Jesus is fully identical to the Trinity. If Jesus is fully identical to the Trinity, and the Father is as well, then the Father is identical to the Son and we no longer have a Trinity. If the phrase "is fully God" means that Jesus is fully divine or fully God in a predicative sense, then this is perfectly compatible with Trinity Monotheism.

Some might object to any position that entails Jesus is not identical to God. The fact that Trinity Monotheism entails that Jesus is not identical to God (regardless of what "God" refers to) is thus an insurmountable difficulty. To this, I will note two things in response. First, nothing in scripture warrants maintaining the truth of "Jesus is identical to God" at all costs. This level of commitment seems to derive from norms and phrases in modern Christian culture, not from the biblical text. Second, and most significantly, affirming the truth of "Jesus is identical to God" in conjunction with "The Father is

47. Craig, "In Defense of Biblical Trinitarianism" kindle loc. 6339.

identical to God" will logically entail that Jesus is identical to the Father. I see no promising way to avoid this.[48]

Implications For Kenotic Christology

It is at this point that we will turn our discussion towards how this model can aid kenotic Christology. Before doing so, it is prudent to summarize the nature of the objections brought against kenotic Christology discussed in the first chapter. In the first chapter, we saw that kenotic Christology has been criticized because it denies that omnipotence and omniscience are essential attributes of God. Swinburne objects to this idea because it conflicts with various arguments from natural theology, while Morris and Loke object to this since it conflicts with our intuitions regarding what a perfect being would be like. Kenotic proponents such as Davis, Feenstra, and Evans have attempted to address this objection by altering God's essential properties to something like omnipotent-unless-kenotically-incarnate-for-redemptive purposes.

However, if one adopts Trinitarian Monotheism, the kenotic proponent has a much simpler solution. The kenotic proponent can agree that God is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, perfect, and so on. However, the kenotic proponent will nuance that these essential properties should be understood as referring to the Trinity as a whole. The Trinity essentially has these properties, but that does not mean each part of the Trinity essentially has these properties. Just as the BTA argument failed because it confused an "is" of predication with an "is" of identity, so are the objections resembling the BKA. Not only that, but objections resembling the BKA fail to nuance the difference between ascribing a property to the Trinity and ascribing a property to a person in the Trinity.

A proponent of kenotic Christology can maintain that Christ lacked omniscience and omnipotence during his earthly career, but nonetheless during

48. For additional resources regarding Trinity Monotheism, see Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Trinity Monotheism," *Philosophia Christi* 2 (2003): 375–403 and William Lane Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder," *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 101–13.

this time the Father still possessed such properties. As a result, it was still true that God was omniscient. One cannot object that Christ would lack divinity if he lacked these properties because that assumes that the only way to be divine is to instantiate all the properties possessed by the Trinity. However, as previously discussed, the Trinity Monotheist will deny that there is only one way to be divine and point out that Christ was still divine in his earthly life because he was still a part of the Trinity.

If such a path is taken by the kenotic proponent, the debate is no longer about what the essential attributes of God are (as everybody agrees about that). Rather, the debate is now about under what conditions divinity can be predicated to a person. When the debate shifts in this way, the kenotic proponent seems to have the upper hand. Arguments against kenotic Christology often take for granted the assumption that if X is an essential attribute of the Trinity, X is required for a person to be divine. However, this is demonstrably false. Most theologians agree that God is essentially triune. However, it is clearly not the case that each person of the Trinity is triune. Thus, if one wants to say that a kenotic Christ is not divine because he lacks a property that is essential to the Trinity, they are committing themselves to the position that the Father and Spirit are also not divine, as they also lack the property of being triune which is possessed by the Trinity.

One might be tempted to dismiss the property of being triune as an exception to the rule. One might suggest instead something like "If X is to be divine, X must possess all the properties that the Trinity possesses, with the exception of being triune." This would be a poetically ironic response, as now it is the kenotic proponent who can accuse their interlocutor of creating ad-hoc definitions. The reader might recall that proponents of kenotic Christology, like Davis and Feenstra, were accused of creating ad-hoc alterations to God's essential properties in order to defend kenotic Christology. However, the above response would entail that ad-hoc alterations are being created *to avoid* kenotic Christology.

This strategy would also face the issue that being triune is not the only property that is essential to the whole but not essential to the parts. In fact, there

are a good number of properties that the Trinity possesses which the persons in the Trinity lack. For example, it is true of the Trinity that the number of persons that compose it is prime. However, this is not true of any singular person (as 1 is neither prime nor composite). It is true of the Trinity that the number of persons that compose it is greater than two, this is also not true of any singular person in the Trinity. It's important to note that these properties, though they all relate to numerical issues, are distinct properties. A number can be greater than two without being three and without being prime.

Not only are there numerical properties that are essentially possessed by the Trinity but not its members, there are also properties relating to the nature of identity. For instance, it is true of the Trinity that it is not identical to the Son. However, it is true of the Son that he is identical to the Son. This can be repeated for the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We can also note several properties relating to Christian doctrine. For instance, as Christians, we are committed to the position that the Trinity created the first thing that came into existence and that nothing external to the Trinity was involved in the Trinity's creation of this first thing. Thus, it is true of the Trinity that it created the first thing without the involvement of anything external to it.[49] However, this is not true of all members of the Trinity, as we are told in Scripture that it was through Christ that all things were created.[50] If The Father is not identical to the Son, and the Father created through the Son, then it is not true of the Father that he created the first thing without involvement of anything external to himself. It is also true of the Trinity that nothing external to it is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, etc. However, this is not true of any person of the Trinity, as the Father has all of these properties and is external to the Son. Additionally, as discussed earlier in this work, a common view throughout Christian history has been the claim that the Father eternally

49. By "external" in this section I mean something which is not identical to the object or identical to one of its parts. Clark Kent is not external to superman because Clark Kent is identical to Superman. The mallet head is not external to the mallet because it is identical to one of the mallet's parts. My car is external to your car because my car is not identical to your car, and my car is not a part of your car.

50. John 1:3, John 1:10, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2.

generates the Son. This also provides us with a relevant example, as if this is the case it is true of the Trinity that it does not rely on anything external to itself to exist. However, this is not a property possessed by the Son.

This is a short list of examples, no doubt many more could be offered. With these remarks in mind, it appears difficult to maintain the position that in order for a person to be divine they must possess all the properties exhibited by the Trinity. If the opponent of kenotic Christology wants to assert that Jesus can't be considered divine because he lacked omniscience, they need to come up with some other criterion on which to argue that contention. The Trinity Monotheist has already offered a criterion for a person to be divine (being a part of the Trinity), which is both reasonable and consistent with Jesus remaining divine while kenotically incarnate.

Potential Objections

William Lane Craig, though a proponent of Trinity Monotheism, is not a proponent of Kenotic Christology. In response to the above use of Trinity Monotheism to defend kenotic Christology, Craig has objected that:

> Just because a divine person can lack the property of being himself triune (tripersonal) doesn't imply that a divine person can lack just any divine attribute. For example, I'm sure you'd agree that no divine person could lack the property of being personal. No person could give up the property of being personal and still be divine. Similarly for goodness: no person could be divine if he were not good. Just run through the usual divine attributes and ask yourself whether any person lacking such an attribute deserves to be called divine...So the inference does not follow that "Just as we can say that the divine nature has the property of being tri-personal which the members of the Trinity lack, we can also say that the divine nature has the

> property of being omniscient which one of the members of the Trinity lacks." That inference would require justification, which I don't think is forthcoming.[51]

This response by Craig raises a reasonable point that not all properties of the whole can be lacked by each person. However, this objection can be met by the kenotic proponent. First, Craig's comment that this "inference would require justification" seems to imply that for any property possessed essentially by the Trinity, our default position should be that it is also essential for the persons of the Trinity. Craig provides a list of properties that a divine person could clearly not give up, and then tries to put the burden of proof on the kenotic proponent to provide justification for why something like omniscience is not among these essential properties.

However, why should we grant Craig this rhetorical move? Our default position could just as well be that for any property essentially possessed by the Trinity, it is possible for a member of the Trinity to lack that property. In this scenario, it would then be Craig's job to show why omniscience cannot be given up. Put simply, the issue is whether we should assume that all essential properties of the Trinity are essential to the persons until shown otherwise, or should we assume that none of the essential properties of the Trinity are essential to the persons until shown otherwise. Craig just assumes and asserts that the default position should be to assume all essential properties of the Trinity are also essential to the persons until proven otherwise. However, that assertion would require justification, which I don't think is forthcoming.

However, regardless of which side of the above dilemma we take, the kenotic theologian seems to manage fine. Let's begin by taking the position that one should not think an essential property of the Trinity is essential to the divine persons until given a reason to think otherwise. If this is the case, it is quite easy

51. William Lane Craig, "#802 Trinity and Incarnation," *Reasonable Faith Question of the Week*, September 2022.

to explain why a divine person could not give up the property of being a person. Consider the following argument:

1. If its possible for the Son to give up the property of being a person, that entails that it is possible for God not to exist.

2. It is impossible for God not to exist.

3. Therefore, it is impossible for the Son to give up the property of being a person.

Craig (and most theologians) will not want to object to premise two, as God's necessary existence enjoys a privileged position in the history of theology. This means that one could only object to premise one. However, premise one is unassailable for a Trinity Monotheist. If God is identical to the three divine persons taken collectively, the absence of a divine person entails the absence of God. Thus, we have good reason to think that the property of being a person is not something Christ could give up.

One might wonder if we could do something similar for the other properties presented by Craig, such as goodness, and I think we can. Consider the following argument:

1. God is essentially and wholly morally perfect.

2. If God is essentially and wholly morally perfect, it is not possible for a part of God to be immoral.

3. If it is possible for a divine person to give up moral goodness, it is possible for part of God to be immoral.

4. It is not possible for any part of God to be immoral.

5. Therefore, it is not possible for a divine person to give up moral goodness.

Again, in this argument we showed that an essential property of the Trinity is also an essential property of the persons. We did this by showing that a divine person lacking the property in question had negative implications on the Trinity as a whole. The question at this point is whether Craig can do the same with omniscience. It seems clear that he cannot, as a divine person lacking omniscience does not entail that the Trinity lacks omniscience in the same manner that a divine person lacking moral perfection entails that the Trinity lacks moral perfection. If the Father and Holy Spirit are omniscient and the Son is not omniscient, it is still true of the Trinity that it knows everything.

It seems like the only way one could object to this previous remark is to maintain that we can't call the Trinity omniscient unless every part of the Trinity is omniscient. However, this is an untenable position. We regularly ascribe properties to a whole that are not possessed by all its parts. For instance, we might say of a strong man that his body is capable of bench pressing 300 pounds, but that does not mean that his left pinky toe possesses this property. We might say of a car that it was made in China, that does not mean every part of the car was made in China.

Thus, if one rejects the rhetorical move of assuming all essential properties of the Trinity are also essential to the persons until given reason to think otherwise, it seems like one does not run into too many problems. I will note at this point that even if one agrees with Craig and maintains that we should think all properties essential to the Trinity are also essential to the persons until shown otherwise, the kenotic theologian need not be bothered. The kenotic theologian can simply point to various Scriptures that depict Jesus as being divine and non-omniscient as their reasoning for thinking otherwise.

We will now turn our attention to a section of Craig's critique previously left unaddressed, which is that we should "Just run through the usual divine attributes and ask yourself whether any person lacking such an attribute deserves to be called divine..."[52] In this statement, Craig is blatantly inconsistent

52. Ibid.

with his articulation and defense of Trinity Monotheism. Consider Craig's remark that:

> One way of being feline is to exemplify the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: a cat's skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat just is a feline animal, as a cat's skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat's DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seems undeniable that there is some sort of part/whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.[53]

In this quote, Craig says that just as a cat's skeleton can be referred to as feline because it is part of a cat, a person can be divine because it is part of God. If Jesus lacks omniscience, but is still part of the Trinity, then according to Craig Jesus can still be regarded as divine. Yet, Craig does not follow his own logic when attacking kenotic Christology. Rather, Craig objects to calling Jesus divine even though Jesus is still a part of God because Jesus does not exemplify certain properties of the divine nature. Ironically, Craig seems to be lapsing into the very position that he has attacked in his work defending Trinity Monotheism. When Craig is defending Trinity Monotheism, he rejects the notion that a person must

53. William Lane Craig and J.P Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, Second (IVP Academic, 2017), 590.

exemplify the divine nature to be called divine and maintains that a person can be divine based on the part/whole relationship they stand in with the Trinity. Yet, when it comes to an incarnational model he disagrees with, all of the sudden Jesus would not "deserve" to be divine if he lacked certain properties of the divine nature. Saying a kenotic Jesus would not "deserve" to be called divine because he lacked omniscience would be like saying a cat's skeleton does not deserve to be called feline because it lacks fur!

At this point, it would be wise to comment on a common theological trend that sometimes sneaks into discussions about kenotic Christology. Craig suggests that Jesus does not "deserve" to be called divine if he lacks certain properties, and Andrew Loke remarks that:

> It is important to note here that the word 'God' can be referring to a 'title' or 'the being who holds the title'. While the attributes of omnipotence, moral perfection, etc(sic) are essential for God as a title, it has been argued that these attributes are not essential to the being who holds the title. In other words, the being who holds the title 'God' can lose some of these attributes, but if He were to do so He would cease from holding the title.[54]

This sentiment, expressed by Craig and Loke, is the height of blasphemy and hubris. Craig and Loke would have us believe that it is they who are the CEOs of the universe, able at any moment to demote God from his position if he does not perform well enough on his quarterly divine attribute review. They would do well to remember that humans do not get to tell God under what conditions he is allowed to keep his title, nor under what conditions he deserves to be called divine. To suggest this is to imply that God is only allowed to be God under their terms and conditions. Only if the Son conforms himself to what they see fit is he allowed to be divine in their eyes.

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54. Andrew Loke, "Divine Omnipotence and Moral Perfection," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (2010): 527.

Conclusion

The discussion presented in this chapter shows how one can adopt kenotic Christology while also affirming both that Jesus is God and that God is essentially omnipotent and omniscient. This is done by recognizing that "Jesus is God" is a statement predicating divinity to Jesus and by recognizing that possessing all the properties of the Trinity is not a requirement for predicating divinity to a person.

Chapter Three

An Argument From Divine Promises

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a strategy was provided to avoid typical objections to kenotic Christology surrounding God's essential attributes. However, my reader may be reluctant to utilize that strategy. This reluctance might arise because of reservations about Trinity Monotheism, or because my reader doesn't like the idea of Jesus lacking omnipotence and omniscience. In this chapter, a strategy will be given that allows a proponent of kenotic Christology to affirm that Christ was omnipotent/omniscient while also maintaining that Christ gave up some abilities and knowledge. This chapter can also offer an explanation of how the Son emptied himself of abilities/knowledge.[1]

Just as our discussion in the last chapter began with a bad argument, so will our discussion in this chapter. Consider the following deductive argument:

1. The ideas expressed in this chapter are similar to those expressed in C. Stephen Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Regent College, 2010), 202-212. Evans encouraged me to pursue this line of thought in an email correspondence, for which I am grateful.

1. If God is omnipotent, it is possible for God to destroy the earth with a flood.

2. If God promises not to do something, it is not possible for him to do that thing.

3. God has promised not to destroy the earth with a flood.

4. It is not possible for God to destroy the earth with a flood

5. Therefore, God is not omnipotent.

This argument is undoubtedly unsound, but where is the issue? Premises 4 and 5 are just entailments of other premises, so the issue does not reside with them. Premise 3 is explicitly communicated to us in Scripture, so it seems like an unlikely candidate for objection.[2] This leaves only premises 1 and 2. Premise 2 is justified by the doctrine that God is essentially morally perfect and impeccable, which has been a common position throughout most of church history. If it is impossible for God to perform an immoral action, and breaking one's promises is immoral, then it is impossible for God to perform an act once he has promised not to do it. If the above remarks are sound, it means that the best way to avoid the conclusion of this argument is to deny premise one. This, it turns out, is quite easy. However, seeing the error in premise one will require a brief discussion on the nature of omnipotence.

What is Omnipotence ?

The general idea of omnipotence can be found all throughout the Old and New Testament. God is called almighty (literally "all-powerful"),[3] we are told there

2. Genesis 9:11

3. Revelation 1:8

is nothing too hard for God,[4] and that nothing will be impossible with God.[5] However, how these verses should be understood has been a complicated and ongoing discussion. While it is unnecessary for our present purpose to provide a comprehensive review of the debate surrounding omnipotence, it is worth briefly reviewing a few different approaches to the doctrine.

One way of understanding omnipotence has been what might be called an act-omnipotence approach, which understands omnipotence in terms of what acts God can perform. A simple form of act-omnipotence might be "P is omnipotent if for any X, P can do X." In this definition, X can represent any task or act that one might want to fill in. However, this definition is likely untenable.[6] While theologians have long debated how omnipotence is to be understood, there has been substantial agreement that there are some acts that an omnipotent being cannot perform. For instance, logically impossible tasks such as creating a square circle cannot be performed by any being, but virtually everybody recognizes that this should not count against a being having omnipotence. Similarly, it is generally recognized that God cannot perform any morally wrong act because of his essential moral goodness.

Because there are some tasks that God cannot perform, various attempts to modify act-omnipotence have been proposed. One might be tempted to modify our above definition to something like "P is omnipotent if for any logically possible X, P can do X." However, it turns out this is also problematic because there are logically possible acts that an omnipotent being cannot do. For instance, an omnipotent being cannot create a statue that was made by a non-omnipotent person, but this task is logically possible to perform (I can do it). One might be tempted to modify the definition again to something like "P is omnipotent if for any X which it is logically possible for P to perform,

4. Jeremiah 32:17

5. Luke 1:37

6. For a discussion of issues with act-omnipotence, see P.T Geach, "Omnipotence," *Philosophy* 48, no. 183 (1973): 7–20 and Kenneth Pearce and Alexander Pruss, "Understanding Omnipotence," *Religious Studies* 48 (2012): 403–14.

P can perform X." However, this also doesn't work because if we restrict what is required of omnipotence to the agent in question, it turns out that a man who necessarily only has the ability to scratch his left ear meets the criteria for omnipotence.[7]

Because of the above issues (and more), act-omnipotence has been rejected and many philosophers have instead endorsed what might be called state-of-affairs-omnipotence (SOAO).[8] SOAO articulates omnipotence not based on what acts can be performed, but on whether the being in question can actualize certain states of affairs. For instance, a SOAO proponent might say something like "P is omnipotent if for any logically possible state of affairs X, P can bring about X." However, as it turns out, this is also too permissive and would need modification. There are some logically possible states of affairs that God cannot bring about. For instance, its logically possible that every person on earth right now freely chooses to raise their right hand. However, God cannot bring about this situation without presenting issues with this action being freely chosen. As a result of this, one might suggest a more rigorous modification such as:

> S is omnipotent at a time t if and only if S can at t actualize any state of affairs that is not described by counterfactuals about the free acts of others and that is broadly logically possible for someone to actualize, given the same hard past at t and the same true counterfactuals about free acts of others.[9]

7. This objection was famously made by Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Cornell University Press, 1967).

8. For a popular and influential account of this, see Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso, "Maximal Power," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred Freddoso (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 81–113, https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/mp.htm .

9. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 535.

Just as with act omnipotence, SOAO seems to get more complicated the longer one thinks about it.

However, due to the complications surrounding SOAO, there are some who have suggested an entirely different approach which we might refer to as "powers-omnipotence." Powers-omnipotence seeks to articulate omnipotence not in terms of acts or what states of affairs can be brought about, but in terms of the powers of the agent. For instance, Eric Wielenberg provides a simple definition of "X is omnipotent if and only if it is not the case that there is some state of affairs, P, such that X is unable to bring about P because of a lack of power in X."[10] To illustrate this concept, Wielenberg offers the following thought experiment:

> Imagine a very strong man. Imagine that he is the strongest possible person: necessarily, no one is stronger than he is. Let's call him "Hercules." Perhaps we doubt that Hercules is in fact the strongest possible person. We want to test his strength. How might we go about this? One obvious test of strength is lifting ability. We ask Hercules to lift a one hundred pound stone. He lifts it easily. Next we ask him to lift a one thousand pound stone; He does so. Similarly for ten thousand pounds, one hundred thousand pounds - Hercules even lifts a million pound stone. So far we have failed to prove that Hercules is not the strongest possible person. But now imagine that we take a ten pound stone and coat it with a substance that renders it incredibly slippery. It is so slippery that no one can get a grip on it. Now we ask Hercules to lift this ten pound stone. Hercules cannot grip the stone and so cannot lift it. "Aha!" we declare triumphantly, "Hercules, you are a liar! You said that you were the strongest possible person, yet you cannot lift this ten

10. Erik Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers.* 17, no. 1 (2000): 39.

> pound stone. This proves that you are not the strongest possible person." But of course we have not proven that Hercules is not the strongest possible person. For we know that Hercules is strong enough to lift the slippery stone - we have just seen him lift much heavier stones. It is not a lack of strength that prevents Hercules from lifting the stone; it is the slipperiness of the stone. Imagine that we have somehow acquired a ten pound stone that is essentially slippery. It is so slippery that no human can grip it, and so no human can lift it. Let's assume that Hercules is essentially human. It follows that there is no possible world in which Hercules lifts this stone. Yet it seems clear that Hercules is strong enough to lift the stone - even though it is metaphysically impossible that he do so.[11]

Just as Hercules's inability to lift the slippery stone is not because of his lack of strength, God's inability to bring about certain states of affairs is not because of his lack of power. God's inability to perform a morally wrong act is not due to a lack of power, it is because the presence of his goodness. In a similar vein, T. J. Mawson has defined omnipotence as "That of having the most power-granting set of abilities that it is logically possible anyone might have."[12] Mawson argues that not all abilities are powers as some abilities are in fact liabilities. God does not have the ability to lie or make unreasonable decisions, but these abilities are not powers, they are liabilities. They make the agent worse for having them. God's inability to perform these tasks therefore is not due to a lack of power.

This has been an incredibly brief, non-exhaustive look at popular approaches to omnipotence. The argument put forth in this chapter does not depend on any specific understanding of omnipotence. My argument depends merely on the assumption that omnipotence does not entail the ability to perform a

11. Ibid, 37.

12. T.J. Mawson, *The Divine Attributes* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 41-42.

morally wrong act, which most proponents of the above categories have agreed upon.

At this point, it is wise to briefly discuss God's goodness and the doctrine of impeccability which states that God is unable to sin. This doctrine has a long and privileged history throughout theistic thought. Augustine says regarding God "He can't sin, he can't lie, he can't be deceived or mistaken; so many things he can't do, and if he could do them he wouldn't be almighty."[13] Anselm makes similar remarks:

> How are You omnipotent if You cannot do all things? But, how can You do all things if You cannot be corrupted, or tell lies, or make the true into the false (such as to undo what has been done), and many similar things? Or is the ability to do these things not power but impotence?[14]

The idea that there are immoral acts that God cannot perform is also found in several places throughout Scripture. We are told in Habakkuk 1:13 that God is "of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." In 2 Timothy 2:13, Paul says "If we are faithless, he remains faithful-for he cannot deny himself." Most explicitly, in Hebrews 6 we are told that it is impossible for God to lie and because of this impossibility God swore by himself to guarantee his oath with Abraham.

In addition to the above biblical justification, impeccability has often been believed to be an entailment of God's perfection. The idea here is that a being which is essentially morally perfect is greater than a being who could lose their

13. Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part III vol. 6, ed. John E. Rotelle O.S.A, trans. Edmund Hill O.P (New City Press, 1990), https://archive.org/details/worksofsaintaugu0000augu/page/n5/mode/2up , 142.

14. M.J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion: With A Reply on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo and The Author's Reply to Gaunilo*, trans. M.J. Charlesworth (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7bdc. , 123.

status of moral perfection. However, this idea has come under fire in recent years. Some philosophers, such as Andrew Loke, have argued that God would in fact be more powerful if he were able to sin. Since God's omnipotence entails maximal power, theologians should therefore part ways with essential moral goodness.[15]

What can be said in response to this suggestion? First, any understanding of omnipotence which leads us to deny essential moral perfection is one which finds no basis in Scripture and in fact directly contradicts Scripture. As noted above, Scripture says quite clearly that there are some things that God's goodness prevents him from doing. In fact, Hebrew 6 explains that God uses his inability to break an oath to guarantee a certain action on his part since once the oath is made, it is impossible for him to break it. If one believes that omnipotence leads us to a view incompatible with the scriptural data, then it seems we should revise (or even dismiss) omnipotence as an attribute of God.

In addition to issues arising from scriptural data, rejection of essential moral perfection is precarious on philosophical grounds. It seems intuitive that a God who lacks the capacity to sin is more perfect than one who has the capacity to sin but merely refrains. If one sacrifices God's impeccability in an attempt to maximize his power, it does not seem like one is paying God any compliments.

However, Loke argues that God's ability to sin is necessary for Christ to be tempted and thus necessary for Christ to lead by example through overcoming temptation.[16] However, the assumption that God must be able to sin in order to accomplish this goal is not obvious. On more than one occasion, I have wrestled with the temptation to eat ice cream only to go to the fridge and discover (with great dismay) that there was none left. It turns out that it was never an option for me to break my diet in the first place. Does this mean I was not truly tempted? If I had never gone to the fridge, wouldn't it still be true that I overcame temptation? If Christ was unable to sin, but did not know he was unable to sin, it seems like he would be able to wrestle with temptation despite

15. Andrew Loke, "Divine Omnipotence and Moral Perfection," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (2010).

16. Ibid, 530.

the fact that sinning was never an option.[17] It may be the case that if Christ had wanted to give into temptation, he may have found his metaphysical fridge empty.

When confronted with scriptural data such as James 1:13 which indicates that God cannot be tempted, Loke reasons as follows:

> It can be argued that James 1.13 can be taken to mean that God cannot be tempted being God simpliciter, and this does not exclude the possibility that God can be tempted if He chooses to be incarnated. The reason why God cannot be tempted being God simpliciter is because He cannot have evil desires being God simpliciter. However, since God can take up a human nature which would make experiencing evil desires and temptation possible.[18]

The idea here seems to be that God is unable to sin so long as he is not incarnate but takes on the ability to sin at the incarnation. However, there seems to be a difficulty in this idea. Suppose that God makes a promise while not being incarnate (such as promising to bless Abraham, promising not to flood the earth, etc.), and then becomes incarnate. While incarnate, can God break the promise he made before his incarnation? Was it possible for the incarnate Christ to destroy the earth with a flood, or to go back on his promise with Abraham?

If Loke says that Christ was in fact able to break promises while incarnate that were made before the incarnation, he is blatantly contradicting Hebrews 6. The idea in Hebrews 6 is that God wanted to guarantee his intentions to Abraham and did so by making an oath. This guaranteed his intentions because it is impossible for God to lie. However, if after making a promise God could become incarnate thus allowing him to break said promise, he guaranteed

17. I am thankful to Timothy Valentino for bringing this option to my attention.

18. Loke, "Divine Omnipotence and Moral Perfection," 533.

nothing. In no way did God's promise render anything impossible, which is the entire point the author of Hebrews is making. For any promise God makes, according to Loke, he has a way out. In contrast, if one maintains that it is impossible for God to sin, incarnated or not, then when God takes an oath he has truly bound himself and rendered something impossible. This coheres better with Hebrews 6 and gives ground for greater confidence in God fulfilling his promises.

If Loke says that Christ was not able to break promises while incarnate that were made before the incarnation, he is undermining his central point. The central point of Loke's rejection of impeccability is that if God does not have the ability to sin, he is not *really* omnipotent. If Christ was unable to break promises made to Abraham, David, or Noah, then Loke would need to be consistent and say that this inability undermined his omnipotence. However, Loke considers Christ's possession of omnipotence as essential to his deity, so this seems like an option he cannot take.

Finally, it seems that Loke's reasoning for rejecting the doctrine of impeccability would lead to God being another contingent being among many. Consider Loke's reasoning for rejecting impeccability:

> One might ask, 'But why prefer a model in which God has the greatest power and is morally perfect simpliciter over a model in which God has great power and is essentially morally perfect?' In reply, a being who has the greatest power has greater power in the actual world than a being who merely has great power. On the other hand, essential moral perfection vis-a`-vis moral perfection simpliciter only confers the additional claim that God has moral perfection in other possible worlds; it does not confer any superiority in the actual world where moral perfection is concerned... Since a being A who is actually the greatest possible being is more worthy of worship than being B who is merely a great being (even if B is a greater being in possible worlds where A chooses not to be the greatest possible

> being), a model in which God has the greatest power possible and is morally perfect simpliciter is to be preferred.[19]

Put simply, Loke believes that God having the ability to sin in the actual world contributes to his greatness in the actual world. In contrast, God's inability to sin only contributes to his greatness in other possible worlds, not this one. Loke thinks maximizing God's power in this world is more important than maximizing God's goodness in other possible worlds.[20]

If this type of reasoning is correct, we should also affirm that God has the ability to cause himself not to exist. Just as God's ability to sin in this world supposedly maximizes his power, God's ability to erase himself from existence should be seen as maximizing his power. After all, God's existence in other possible worlds supposedly does not contribute to his greatness in this world and affirming God's ability to erase himself from existence would maximize God's power in this world.

Its important to note that Loke cannot respond by saying something along the lines of "God is a necessary being which means erasing himself from existence is logically impossible, which does not fall under the domain of omnipotence." He cannot say this because the very nature of the debate is whether we should ascribe necessary existence to God, just as the previous debate was on whether we should ascribe necessary moral goodness to God. If Loke's argument against ascribing necessary moral goodness to God is sound, then to be consistent, he should also give up God's necessary existence. If this is the case, then God is no longer the ground of all contingent reality. God is himself a member of contingent reality and we must seek something outside of him to ground his existence. Loke cannot object by saying that God's continued

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19. Ibid, 533-34

20. Language about "possible worlds" is just a shorthand way for philosophers to discuss possible states of affairs. When one says, "There is a possible world in which God does X," that does not mean that the world in question exists. Rather, it just means that there is a possible description of reality in which God does X.

existence is contingent upon his will, and thus we do not need to go outside of God to find the explanation for his existence. Loke cannot object in this way because God's willing of his existence is itself contingent. To escape this issue, Loke only needs to recognize the obvious fact that virtually all theologians have recognized which is that God's attributes in other possible worlds do indeed contribute to his greatness in this world. The second Loke recognizes this fact, his entire argument against essential moral perfection crumbles.

With the above discussion of omnipotence and essential goodness in mind, we can see that the first premise in our terrible argument is not true, or rather, is not unconditionally true. Whether an omnipotent being is able to destroy the earth with a flood depends on if the omnipotent being has made a promise not to do so. If a promise has been made, then destroying the earth with a flood no longer falls under the domain of omnipotence because, as mentioned, omnipotence does not entail the ability to do what is morally wrong. Thus, we have spotted the error in the above syllogism, and we can still maintain that despite God's inability to destroy the earth with a flood, God remains omnipotent.

It is worth noting something of interest with this line of reasoning, which is that it implies God has the ability to move certain actions outside the domain of what omnipotence entails. Before God makes the promise not to destroy the earth with a flood, it is still possible for him to perform that action as it does not constitute an impossible or immoral act. However, when God makes a promise, the action in question goes from being within omnipotence's domain to outside of it. This maneuvering is accomplished through God's use of his moral perfection.

Implications for Kenotic Christology

With this lesson learned from our terrible argument, the kenotic theologian can propose the following question: What if the Son, as he is getting ready to be incarnated, says to the Father or to the heavenly host something along the lines of "I promise to go down and live as one of them, with all of their weaknesses

and all their frailties. Just as they must depend on the good will of the Father in their struggles, I promise to only rely on the goodwill of the Father in my struggles. I will not use any of my own powers to aid my earthly life, but like them, I will trust that the Father will do what is best for me. I will live in this way so that through my suffering I can draw them back to us."

If such a promise is made, notice the implications. The Son, as a result of his promise, would be unable to perform a variety of actions on earth just as God is unable to destroy the earth with a flood as a result of his promise to Noah. However, just as with the flood example, the Son's inability to perform these tasks would not detract from his omnipotence because these acts (being immoral) no longer fall under the domain of omnipotence. Thus, the kenotic theologians can have their cake and eat it too. One can say that the Son truly emptied himself of certain abilities which he previously possessed and despite the fact that he emptied himself of these abilities, we can affirm that the Son never ceased to be omnipotent. The Son never ceased to be omnipotent because in his emptying himself of certain abilities, he merely used his perfect goodness to move them outside the domain of omnipotence.

If we think of kenosis in this way, many objections discussed in in our historical survey evaporate. For instance, take the objection that kenosis entails that the Son is no longer engaged in the divine function of governing creation. If a promise like the one offered above is made, we can coherently say that the Word is still omnipotent, he is still engaged in his world-governing functions, but he nonetheless cannot ease his hunger by snapping his fingers and creating a pretzel. We can coherently say this because the promise the Son made was to restrict his powers in relation to what would aid his human life.

What about Christ's exaltation or his ability to regain his abilities once they were lost? If the Son promises to restrict his abilities until the time of his resurrection by the Father, then the restriction has an inbuilt expiration date. What about all of the countless arguments about omnipotence being an essential property? They can easily be sidestepped, as the kenotic theologian can agree that omnipotence is an essential property of the Son and that he never empties himself of it. What is emptied by the Son is not omnipotence, but the

ability to perform specific tasks. The ability to perform these specific tasks is not essential, it is accidental. Just as God's ability to destroy the earth with a flood is contingent upon whether he makes a promise not to, the Son's ability to draw upon his own power while embodied is contingent on his promise not to.

If the kenotic theologian takes the strategy outlined above, how does this fare compared to other strategies that kenotic proponents have offered? Regarding omnipotence, it seems that the above solution is preferable to much of what has been offered in the literature as it does not require one to say that Christ lacked omnipotence (which ruffles many feathers), or to deny that omnipotence is an essential attribute of God. This strategy also does not require any weird, ad-hoc redefining of essential properties.

What About Omniscience?

The thoughtful reader at this point might be thinking "That might work for omnipotence, but can you do that with omniscience?" To which my response is— maybe? Whether something similar can work for omniscience is strongly dependent on how one defines omniscience. Let us begin our discussion of omniscience with an argument:

1. It is possible for the Son to promise not to know some proposition.
2. If the Son promises not to know some proposition, it's impossible for him to know that proposition.
3. It is possible for the Son to not know some proposition.

If this argument is successful, a major obstacle to kenotic Christology has been dismantled. However, I suspect that the reader has a laundry list of objections ready and admittedly there are a lot of avenues for this argument to go wrong. A defense of premise 2 has already been discussed in previous sections regarding God's moral perfection, so we will turn our attention to premise 1. Premise 1 is likely to raise objections and understandably so. It is not clear whether it is logically possible for the Son (being omniscient), to promise not to

know some proposition. If the Son is essentially omniscient, promising not to know some proposition might be a contradiction. We can present an argument against premise 1 as follows:

1. If the Son is essentially omniscient, it is impossible for the Son to not know a true proposition.
2. It's impossible for the Son to make a promise to do something which is impossible.
3. The Son is essentially omniscient.
4. It's impossible for the Son to promise not to know some true proposition.

Now what? This line of thought seems reasonable at first glance, and if so, it seems we are back where we started. However, if we can reason in this way to conclude that it is impossible for the Son to promise not to know something, should we not also be able to reason that its impossible for the Son to promise not to destroy the earth with a flood? It seems like if the Son's essential omniscience prevents him from being able to make a promise which restricts his knowledge, it should also be the case that his essential omnipotence prevents him from making a promise which restricts his ability to destroy the earth with a flood. However, we already know that God can make a promise not to destroy the earth with a flood. This seems to indicate that there is something wrong with denying the possibility of a knowledge-restricting promise. My reasoning here is as follows:

1. If God's essential omniscience entails that it is impossible for him to make a knowledge-restricting promise, God's essential omnipotence should also entail that it is impossible for him to make an ability-restricting promise.
2. It is not the case that God's essential omnipotence entails that it is impossible for him to make an ability-restricting promise.
3. Therefore, it is not the case that God's essential omniscience entails that it is impossible for him to make a knowledge-restricting promise.

In this argument, the only place one can object is premise one. In defense of premise one, I will simply remark that it seems inconsistent to say God's omniscience prevents him from making knowledge-restricting promises, but his omnipotence does not restrict God from making ability-restricting promises. Why would it be that God's omnipotence is subject to his will and moral goodness, but his omniscience is not?

If one shares my intuition against granting this asymmetry regarding God's omniscience and omnipotence, then it seems like it is possible for God to restrict his knowledge through the use of a promise. The question at this point is whether this post-promise state entails that God lacks omniscience. How we answer that question ultimately comes down to how one defines omniscience. If one uses a simple definition of omniscience such as "X is omniscient only if X knows all true propositions and believes no false propositions," then after the knowledge-restricting promise is made it would clearly be the case that the Son is not omniscient. However, that is not the only definition of omniscience to consider. For instance, Richard Swinburne has argued that "A being is omniscient if he knows at each time all true propositions which it is logically possible that he entertain."[21] If this is the definition of omniscience used, then Jesus would still remain omniscient even after he made a promise not to know something. One could reason that if the Son promises not to know X, it is logically impossible for him to know X. Omniscience only requires the Son to know what it is logically possible for him to know, thus, the fact that the Son does not know X does not count against his omniscience.

Thus, under this definition, the kenotic proponents are having a wonderful time. They can affirm that there are true propositions that Jesus did not know, but they also can affirm that he is omniscient (and essentially so). The question is how we should define omniscience and debates surrounding this issue are not often based around incarnational concerns. Some thinkers have suggested that omniscience should only be understood as entailing God's propositional

21. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 131.

knowledge.[22] Other thinkers have suggested that omniscience needs to include knowledge of all non-propositional qualitative states (what it is like to be in pain, what it is like to feel despair, etc.).[23] However, some might think that God's omniscience is limited by his goodness which prevents him from having knowledge which is intrinsically immoral.[24] For instance, Francis McConnell remarks,

> If the divine knowledge is based, so to speak, on sympathetic insight, does not such insight preclude a divine knowledge of evil? Of course it does, in any sympathetic experience. The divine God of the Christ knows more about some aspects of evil than any other intelligence. He knows more of its cost. Evil means more distress to him than anyone else. Still, he cannot know evil in the experience of friendly response to evil. He can have sympathy for the soul of low ideals, but not sympathy with that soul. If this is a limitation of the omniscience, let it be so. The approach to God through Christ is not concerned with the preservation of formal omniscience at the cost of moral worth.[25]

In addition to issues regarding God's knowledge of subjective states, more than a few thinkers have revised the definition of omniscience based on

22. William Lane Craig, "#677 God's Propositional and Non-Propositional Knowledge," *Reasonable Faith Question of the Week,* April 2020.

23. Linda Zagzebski, "Omnisubjectivity: Why It Is a Divine Attribute," *Nova et Vetera* 14, no. 2 (2016): 435–50.

24. For an interesting discussion of this issue, see Ryan Mullins, "Omnisubjectivity and the Problem of Creepy Divine Emotions," *Religious Studies* 58, no. 1 (2022): 162-179.

25. Francis McConnell, *The Christlike God: A Survey of the Divine Attributes From the Christian Point of View* (The Abingdon Press, 1927), 115.

how omniscience interacts with free will. Thinkers such as William Hasker,[26] Richard Swinburne,[27] and Peter van Inwagen[28] have argued that there are true propositions that God does not know regarding future free acts. They maintain that it is impossible for an omniscient being to know what a creature would freely do in the future, as knowing it would entail that the act is not free. As a result, they have proposed definitions of omniscience which are limited to beliefs that are logically/metaphysically possible for God to hold.

So where does that leave the kenotic proponent? If you embrace a definition of omniscience which maintains that God knows only what is possible for him to know (and not all true propositions), then the above rhetorical strategy works well. We can now argue that Christ could lack certain knowledge and still be omniscient, thus dodging a central objection to kenotic Christology. However, I will note that such definitions of omniscience are not without their detractors, and it is wise to hear their complaints. After a rigorous presentation and assessment of the different views of omniscience, Benjamin Arbour remarks:

> This all runs contrary to what we take to be the most natural interpretation of plain readings of the Scriptures of all three Abrahamic faiths. However one conceives of the relationship between philosophy and special revelation in analytic theology, at minimum, we must insist that information runs both ways. Yes, philosophy can inform theology; but theology can also inform, and perhaps constrain, what is allowed by philosophy. Also, aside from concerns stemming from special revelation, it's difficult to see how anything less than knowledge of 100 percent of all truths counts as perfect knowledge, rather than something like nearly perfect, or "as close to perfect as

26. William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Cornell University Press., 1998), 187.

27. Swinburne, *The Christian God,* 131.

28. Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2008), 216-231.

> possible." Additionally, it's hard to see how a being that doesn't know everything genuinely counts as omniscient, since "omni" implies all. This point stands despite efforts by many to redefine omniscience along modal lines. Those who want to insist that knowledge of 100 percent of all truths is impossible should opt for a term other than omniscience, because, technically speaking, maximal epistemic greatness doesn't yield a divine being that is all-knowing.[29]

When Arbour makes these remarks about the natural interpretation of plain Scripture, he likely has in mind verses such as 1 John 3:20 and Job 37:16 which say, "For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything" and "Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?" I must confess I find myself sympathetic to these remarks. However, I think there is a central issue with this line of reasoning.

To see the issue with this line of reasoning, recall our discussion of omnipotence. In Scripture, we see remarks like "For God all things are possible" and "Nothing will be impossible with God." Furthermore, God is called "Almighty" which literally means "all powerful." The most natural interpretation and plain readings of these texts would be that God can do any act, even morally bad ones and ones we would call illogical. In fact, a straightforward reading of Matthew 19:26 would entail there aren't any logically impossible acts. Yet, as discussed earlier, theologians regularly recognize that there are limits of what God can do, and we recognize these limits because of the various verses which say that God cannot deny himself, break a promise, or look on evil. Put simply, we cultivate our understanding of verses like Matthew 19:26 in light of other Scriptures such as Hebrews 6:18.

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29. Benjamin Arbour, "Maximal Greatness and Perfect Knowledge," in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T Turner (T&T Clark, 2021), 124.

If this is an acceptable practice for understanding omnipotence, why is it not also an acceptable practice for omniscience? If we can read statements of God's power like Matthew 19:26 in light of verses like Hebrews 6:18, why can we not read verses about God's knowledge in 1 John 3:20 in light of verses like Matthew 24:36 or Genesis 22:12? Theologians have long understood omnipotence by looking at the entirety of Scripture, why do we not do the same for omniscience? If omnipotence needs to be understood in light of Hebrews 6:18 and 2 Timothy 2:13, I contend that omniscience needs to be understood in light of Matthew 24:36, Hebrews 5:8, and Luke 2:52. Scripture simply does not provide a definition of omniscience, so if this is an attribute we wish to attribute to God, how we understand that attribute needs to be tempered by the entirety of Scripture. Once we do that, the proponent of kenotic Christology has the tools to argue for a more lenient definition of omniscience.

Coherence With Biblical Data

So far in this chapter, we have seen that the kenotic proponent may be able to affirm Jesus' omnipotence and omniscience while also affirming that Jesus emptied himself of knowledge and abilities in the incarnation. This can be done by postulating that Jesus made a promise which restricted his abilities and knowledge. However, one might wonder how this promise-based strategy meshes with the biblical data. I suggest that my strategy meshes well with the biblical data for several reasons.

First, it is important to note that Scripture is filled with God making promises and committing himself to covenants. After the great flood, God promises to never destroy the earth again in this manner.[30] After the Tower of Babel incident, God makes a promise to Abraham.[31] After leaving Egypt, God makes

30. Genesis 9:11–12; 6:18; 9:9–17

31. Genesis 12:2–3; 15:17–18

a covenant with Moses.[32] Later, God makes a promise to David.[33] We are told that before the ages began, God promised us eternal life.[34] God promised a new heavens and a new earth.[35] God describes himself as having made a covenant with day and night.[36]

All of the above examples make evident that I am not suggesting something that is alien to God's standard operating procedure. While the above passages are examples of God making promises in a general sense, there are also a number of Scriptures that discuss God making a promise in relation to Christ's redeeming work. For instance, we are told that Christ "Has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises."[37] Similarly, we are told in Hebrews 7:21 that when Christ became our high priest,

> It was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.[38]

At this point, I will propose that if Jesus had access to all his powers and knowledge in the incarnation, he would have been disqualified as being a high priest. If he was disqualified from being our high priest, he would not have

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32. Exodus 19:5–6

33. Psalm 89:2–4, 26–38; Acts 2:30.

34. Titus 1:2

35. 2 Peter 3:13

36. Jeremiah 33:20–26

37. Hebrews 8:6

38. Hebrews 7:20-22

been able (according to Hebrews) to be the guarantor of the new covenant. I will begin my case for this position by noting several passages in Hebrews. We are told in Hebrews 2:17 that Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Later in Hebrews 4:15 we are told: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Finally, in Hebrews 5:1-2 we see, "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness."

These verses seem to indicate that a necessary condition of the high priestly role is the ability to sympathize with those for whom the priest is interceding and to be beset with their weaknesses. In Hebrews 2:17, the author seems to think that in order to have these priestly requirements, Christ had to "become like his brothers in every respect." This idea of "being like us in all respects" is used again in 4:15 in connection with sympathy, weakness, and being tempted. It is at this point we should pause and note some important implications of these passages. Before the incarnation, Christ was apparently not qualified to be our high priest. Something happened at the incarnation and throughout Jesus' life which gave him the qualifications he lacked.

What was this qualification? It cannot simply be that before the incarnation Jesus did not have a flesh and blood body, as the Scriptures above connect the qualifications with Christ suffering as we have. For instance, Hebrews 2:18 states, "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." There is a clear causal connection between being tempted/suffering as we have and his new ability to be our high priest, so any explanation we offer must account for this connection.

One might postulate that in becoming incarnate and suffering with us Christ acquired certain knowledge of what it is like to suffer and be tempted that he previously did not have. This interpretation might be tempting, as it provides a reasonable interpretation of what Christ lacked and how he acquired it.

However, if Christ's suffering on this earth was so that he could gain knowledge he otherwise did not have, this seems to present serious theological difficulties. If Christ had to become like us in all respects so that he could sympathize with our weaknesses, how do we square that with Christ's omniscience before the incarnation? Before the incarnation, did Christ have no clue what it was like to suffer?

If Christ had no clue what it was like to suffer, it seems like he was not omniscient before the incarnation. Second, is it not incredibly odd to suggest that the same Christ who created our nerve endings had no clue what it was like for those nerve endings to transmit pain? On top of being odd, is it not borderline reckless for Christ to create us with the ability to suffer if he had no idea what that suffering felt like? Are we to believe that prior to the incarnation Jesus was sitting in heaven thinking to himself, "I do not understand what all these complaints regarding pain are about. I had better go check this out." This issue does not just present itself with physical suffering, but also with psychological suffering. When Job was lamenting his dead children, was Christ sitting in heaven thinking to himself "He seems really upset about all this, I wonder what he is feeling...."

This is clearly ridiculous, yet we have to find some answer for how Jesus becoming like us and suffering as we do qualified him to intercede for us in a way that he was not able to before. However, it also seems like we have to affirm that Christ knew what pain and suffering were like before he became incarnate. An escape from this predicament is that instead of suggesting that the missing qualification that Jesus acquired was some form of knowledge, we could propose that Jesus lacked certain experiences which, while not conveying any new knowledge of suffering, still contributed to his ability to intercede for us.

To give an analogy, suppose that Bob is really into finance and investing. In his spare time, Bob reads financial papers, audits classes at the local community college, and indulges in anything related to the topic. Through his self-study, Bob's level of knowledge grows to the point that he is more knowledgeable than most financial advisers. Bob could easily take any financial certification exam

and pass with a perfect score if he desired, but he is merely a hobbyist, so he does not bother.

Despite the fact that Bob has all the knowledge needed to be a financial advisor. Bob would be unable to accept any job as a financial advisor unless he took the necessary tests and acquired the necessary certifications. None of these tests give Bob any knowledge he did not already have, but they are nonetheless required for Bob to start his career as a financial advisor. Even if a prospective employer knew with certainty that Bob had all the needed knowledge, they would still not allow Bob to take a job without Bob passing the relevant exams.

Why would Bob not be allowed to take the job despite the fact that he has the knowledge? I propose two major reasons. First, taking the job without the certifications would be against an existing law regarding what one must have to be employed in such a way. Second, though the certifications do not serve to give Bob knowledge, they do serve as an outward sign to others that Bob has the knowledge needed. In having these certifications, Bob and his employer are protected against a variety of potential allegations.

If one is squeamish about affirming that Christ gained new knowledge of suffering in the incarnation (as I am), I propose that we think of Christ's suffering on earth as qualifying him in the same way that certifications qualify Bob. It was not that Christ had to gain certain qualitative knowledge; it was that Christ had to gain certain experiences. Why might Christ need to gain certain experiences? The possible answers to that question are similar to the same reasons that Bob would need to acquire certification. First, it may be a divinely declared law that these experiences are required for priesthood. Second, it may be that Christ's experiences serve as an outward sign of proof which verify his ability to sympathize with us. If one believes that the history of our world involves a cosmic court case between the powers of darkness and the powers of light (as I have argued for elsewhere)[39], then this outward display is not just to defeat our allegations, but also to defeat any potential allegations by the devil.

39. James Agnew, *The Devil's Disbarment: Exploring Christ's Victory In The Divine Council* (self-pub., Amazon Kindle, 2024).

With these remarks made, we can circle back to the original issue which is whether Christ could have had access to his God powers/knowledge and still be qualified as a high priest. My argument in support of this premise is that in order to say that Christ is truly sympathetic to our plight, the phrase "in every respect" needs to include the inability to perform certain tasks and lack of knowledge in at least some areas.

To begin, let us consider a thought experiment. Imagine a woman named Nelvia who has been diagnosed with esophageal cancer. This cancer is almost always terminal, and often results in a long painful death. Nelvia, like many who receive this dreaded diagnosis, does her best to put up a fight. She goes through several rounds of chemo and radiation therapy and has a feeding tube put in because the cancer in her esophagus has rendered it impossible for her to swallow anything, including water. However, there are a variety of complications throughout these medical procedures which increase Nelvia's suffering. Examples of these complications include various issues with the feeding tube which result in additional surgeries to fix it, or bad reactions to various pain medications.

Eventually, after spending months enduring these complications, Nelvia is told that these cures were unsuccessful and there is nothing left for the doctors to try. She is then placed into a hospice center where she is to live for the remainder of her life on earth. During this time, she becomes increasingly fatigued and less cognitively coherent. Eventually, it gets to the point where she is unresponsive, and she starts to show signs that her death will arrive in a matter of hours. Her family and friends are notified, and they remain seated with her until the time of her passing. This thought experiment hits close to home for most of us, myself included. However, it is because of our lived familiarity with this type of situation that we are able to sufficiently analyze it.

With this thought experiment in mind, lets now ask the question "In what ways did Nelvia suffer?" The first (and most obvious) answer is that she suffered physically. During this trial, Nelvia felt immense amounts of physical pain. This pain arose from the cancer in her esophagus, the surgery conducted for the installation of the feeding tube, her constant nausea, and a host of other issues.

However, there is a different type of suffering that persisted throughout this ordeal. Specifically, there was psychological suffering. There was fear and uncertainty before each appointment with the doctor. With each new wave of physical pain that arose, there were the lingering questions of "How long is this going to last? Am I going to make it through this?" There was the stress of trying to navigate the complicated procedures for medication and diet that accompanied her medical regime. There was doubt about whether the therapy would succeed. There was loneliness, as Nelvia knew it was she alone that had to walk this road and none of her comforters could relate.

There was throughout the process an unending helplessness and despair, especially upon being told that she was to go into hospice. There was the knowledge that nothing, short of an act from heaven, could save her from her plight. There was the lingering hope, surrounded by doubt, with every prayer for healing that she uttered. There was the despair and uncertainty that arose every time she heard the doctors having a private conversation with her family in a hushed conversation.

There was the suffering that came from her knowing that there would be things in the life of her family that she would miss. She knew that when her oldest son got married, she would not be there for it. She knew that when her youngest son received his doctorate, she would not be there for it. There was likely great fear and uncertainty about the hour of her death. She had questions like "Is it going to be peaceful? Is it going to hurt when my soul leaves my body? What is the afterlife going to be like?" In addition to Nelvia's psychological suffering, there was great psychological suffering on the part of those around her, who spent hours sitting around her death bed wondering if each breath was going to be Nelvia's last.

Now, suppose that there is another person named Sally who is also diagnosed with esophageal cancer. However, there is a crucial distinction between Sally and Nelvia. Sally endures all of the physical suffering that Nelvia endures, but she knows exactly how every step in the process will play out and has the ability to heal herself at any moment. Sally knows the exact response her body will have to every medical treatment. She knows exactly how long each wave of pain will

last, she knows the moment of her death, and she has the ability to stop this at any moment, but simply chooses not to. Not only that, Sally knows with perfect certainty that upon her death that she will go to heaven and all will be well. She knows whether or not the release of her soul from her body will hurt and she knows exactly what heaven will be like. She knows what flavor gum Saint Peter is chewing at the Pearly Gates. Now we must ask a question, does Sally's experience allow her to fully sympathize with Nelvia? Can Sally say that she has been in Nelvia's shoes and walked her path?

To say that Sally can fully sympathize with Nelvia's plight seems absolute insanity. Sally did not fully sympathize with Nelvia's complete helplessness because Sally was never truly helpless. Sally cannot sympathize with Nelvia's fears, doubts, uncertainties, worries, and stress, because all of these stemmed from lack of knowledge. Sally never had this lack of knowledge, so it cannot reasonably be said that she had the fears of what death would be like, or the anxiety of whether chemo was working, or the fear of if she was going to get her affairs together before the hour of her passing. We can say that Sally has the ability to fully sympathize with Nelvia's *physical* suffering, but there was a lot more to Nelvia's experience than mere physical suffering.

Even if one modifies this thought experiment so that Sally has the ability to be aware of all these truths but merely chooses not to, it still seems like she did not suffer to the same degree as Nelvia. So long as Sally had access to the answers that plagued her, and so long as she knew she had access to those answers, she simply did not experience the same degree of despair and hopelessness that Nelvia did. A night spent sleeping under the stars because you want a break from your house is quite different from a night spent sleeping under the stars because you do not have one.

We must now ask the question, do we as Christians have a high priest who has fully endured what we endure, or one who has only endured our physical suffering? If Christ is to be our high priest, and he is able to truly sympathize with all our struggles, it has to be the case that he has not just endured our physical suffering, he also has to have endured our psychological suffering. If

one says that Christ is only able to fully sympathize with our physical suffering, a significant issue emerges.

There are certainly many instances in which we sin because of some type of physical pain. Perhaps we stub our toe and yell something we should not, or we seek to drown out the physical pain by getting drunk. However, it seems like many, if not most, of our sins arise out of some form of psychological suffering. We are greedy and uncharitable because we have fears and anxieties about our money running out or we have doubts about how the recipient will use our donation. We often reach for a bottle or a pill because we have depression, anxiety, loneliness, stress, fear and so on. Various vices are often attempts to distract and cover up our psychological suffering.[40]

However, if many of our sins stem from psychological suffering, and Christ cannot fully sympathize with our psychological suffering because of his lack of limitations, that seems to entail that anytime we engage in sin because of our psychological suffering, we do not have a high priest interceding for us who has endured the same thing. A high priest who cannot sympathize with our psychological weaknesses does not seem like one we can draw close to with confidence.

However, the point being made in Hebrews is that *we can* have confidence in our high priest being gentle towards us. Immediately after we are told, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin," we are encouraged to "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."[41] The entire rhetorical point of this verse in Hebrews is encouraging the audience to have confidence in drawing near to the throne of God. The reason we can confidently draw near to the throne of God is because Christ has gone through what we go through.

If Christ becoming "like us in all respects" was necessary to prove to the heavenly beings that he was qualified to serve in the role of high priest or

40. My source for this claim is my own experience, an area in which I am undoubtedly an expert.

41. Hebrews 4:14-16

necessary to adhere to a divine law, it seems like Christ had to truly experience the helplessness, ignorance, weakness, and psychological suffering that we do. If Christ did not experience these things, then it seems like he has not gained some of the necessary qualifications for being a high priest. The only way for Christ to get the needed experiences to qualify him for his priestly role is if he was at some point truly helpless and truly ignorant. For Christ to go from a state of non-helplessness and non-ignorance to a state of helplessness and ignorance would require that Christ emptied himself of the very things that kenotic Christology has always claimed he gave up.

Andrew Loke, however, does not think that the above remarks in Hebrews are sufficient to support a kenotic understanding of the incarnation. Loke remarks:

> It has also been objected that Scriptural passages such as Heb. 2:17 ('[Christ] had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God') indicate that Christ will remain limited in his glorified state (Evans 2002, 265–6). However, the following verses – 'and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted' (Heb. 2:17b-18) – indicate that Christ 'had to become like his brothers and sisters' in the sense that he was able to make atonement by dying physically (cf. Heb. 7:27) and that he was able to suffer and be tempted. This passage does not warrant the conclusion that Christ will be like us totally (which of course is impossible; Christ, being male, could not have become like sisters totally).[42]

42. Andrew Loke, *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation,* Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Routledge, 2014), 147.

In this passage, Loke seeks to understand Christ "becoming like us in all respects" as merely a reference to him becoming a human so that he could physically die. However, this is an untenable interpretation of Hebrews, as this fundamentally misrepresents how the author of Hebrews understands atonement. In Levitical sacrifices, sin was not atoned for once the animal had been killed. Rather, the killing of the animal was the first step in the atonement process. After the animal had been killed, its blood was sprinkled on the furniture in the holy place and most holy place, and the sacrifice was presented before God by the high priest.[43] The author of Hebrews similarly believes that after his death, Christ entered into the heavenly holy places purifying it with his blood and offering himself as the sacrifice to God.[44] After this, Christ remains forever in the presence of God as our high priest.

The author of Hebrews primarily understands the atoning work of Christ through what Christ did *after* his death, not Christ's death itself (though his death is what freed us from the powers of the Devil).[45] It is because Christ is our interceding High Priest that we can be saved, as Hebrews 7:25 makes clear, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Hebrews 2:18 connects Christ's ability to atone for our sins not with his death, but with his suffering when tempted. Similarly, Hebrews 4:15 emphasizes that we can draw near to the throne of God because our high priest is "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." This is immediately followed by the beginning of Hebrews 5 which describes that the high priest is able to deal gently with his people because he himself has been beset with weakness.

Hebrews explicitly connects Christ's ability to be our high priest with him suffering and being tempted as we have, which allows him to be sympathetic and merciful. The reason this is emphasized by the author of Hebrews is because the sacrifice of Christ which was presented to the Father for our atonement was not

43. Leviticus 16

44. See Hebrews 9 - 10.

45. Hebrews 2:14.

his dead body on the cross but his blood in the heavenly holy place. It is because Christ presented this perfect offering to the Father that he is able to remain as our priest, and it is through this high priestly role that we are saved. Loke's interpretation fails because it seeks to reduce Hebrews' atonement theology to a simplistic model of penal substitution in which all Jesus needed to do was die.

It is also worth speaking briefly on Loke's comment, "This passage does not warrant the conclusion that Christ will be like us totally (which of course is impossible; Christ, being male, could not have become like sisters totally)." This comment misses the mark as what is in mind with Christ "being like us in all respects" has to do with his humanity and what he has suffered which qualifies him to be a high priest. A man who gets stabbed in the shoulder and a woman who gets stabbed in the shoulder have experienced the same thing and thus can sympathize with one another. The difference in their sex makes no difference in relation to each other's suffering.

However, a man who gets a paper cut on his left toe cannot sympathize with a man who gets stabbed in the shoulder, and a man who gets stabbed in the shoulder cannot relate to the man who just watched his child die of cancer. They have all suffered, but they have endured different types of suffering and to a different degree. The issue at hand is whether Christ endured all the same types of suffering that we do, and to the same degree that we do. If Christ could at any moment of anxiety reach into his mind and pull out the answer to a question, it seems difficult to say he has suffered as we have when no such option is available to us. Elsewhere Loke argues:

> Additionally, the 'like us in all respects' that the author had in mind may well be trials that were common to Jesus and the readers of Hebrews – such as denunciation, arrest, and abuse (Matt. 26:59–68, 27:26–31 par.; cf. Heb. 10:32–4, 13:13) (Koester 2001, 283).Concerning sympathizing with believers, which is the main point of this verse, sympathy with the believer in his trial does not depend on having absolute commonality of experiences such as the experience of sin, but on the experience

> of the strength of suffering and temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity (Bruce 1996, 116).[46]

Again, we see Loke try to create an interpretation that deviates from what the immediate context demands. Hebrews 2:17 immediately connects Christ becoming like us in all respects with his ability to be a merciful and faithful high priest. Christ is a merciful and faithful high priest not just to the community Hebrews was written to, but to all of humanity. Thus, this verse demands an understanding that is global to all of humanity, and not just to the specific community that received Hebrews. Similarly, Hebrews 2:11, "He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers." All humanity comes from the same source; thus, all humanity is in mind when we see that Christ must be made "like his brothers in all respects."

I will conclude this discussion of the biblical data by evaluating two verses that may be brought against my proposal. First, one might point to John 16:30 which has the disciples saying, "Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." This passage has the disciples saying that Christ knew all things, but I have proposed that Christ in fact did not know all things. Has my proposal thus run aground?

I think not, as this verse has the disciples saying that Jesus knew all things, not Jesus himself saying it. If I must choose between what the disciples said about Jesus' knowledge and what Jesus himself said about his knowledge, I am going with Jesus. This would not be the first time that the disciples were wrong about something regarding Jesus, as Peter himself proclaims that Jesus would never even be killed.[47] This is not an attempt to smear the disciples, it is simply to note that during Jesus' earthly life the disciples did not fully understand who he

46. Loke, *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation,* 142.

47. Matthew 16:22

was or what his work consisted of. Thus, taking this verse as a reason to reject kenotic Christology is mistaken.

The second objection that might be raised against my proposal on biblical grounds comes from Matthew 26:48-56, which describes the betrayal of Jesus shortly before his crucifixion. Consider the following passage:

> Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. **Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"** At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. **But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."** Then all the disciples left him and fled. (emphasis mine)

An objector might note that in this passage Jesus is explicitly saying that he could escape from his plight if he wanted to. Yet, much of my previous argument depends upon the assumption that Jesus had to be truly helpless. Thus, it appears at first glance that my proposal has a tough road ahead. How might I respond to this objection? I will begin by noting that I think this is probably the strongest objection that can be raised against my proposal, and

I admit that it certainly has some bite to it. However, using this passage as a defeater for my position is not as easy as it might look.

In response, I will note two things about this passage. First, notice the exact words of our Lord. Jesus does not say "Do you think I cannot snap my fingers and turn them into mice?" Rather, Jesus says that he can appeal to his Father, and that his Father will send angels to assist him. Even in this passage we see Jesus being dependent on the Father and not on his own power. Second, notice what Jesus says immediately after making his statement about appealing to the Father, "But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so." Immediately after Jesus says he could appeal to his Father for an escape he indicates that this all must take place, and the reason it must take place is for Scripture to be fulfilled.

If the Scriptures being fulfilled were the promises and covenants made to Abraham, David, and the other prophets in the Old Testament, and if Jesus' capture was required for the fulfillment of these Scriptures, then in some sense it would be impossible for Jesus to stop these events. If Jesus had stopped the events, that would entail that the Scriptures were not fulfilled, which would entail that God did not fulfill his promises. However, as we have discussed at length, it is not possible for God to break a promise.

So why does Jesus say he could appeal to his Father if in some sense he cannot? Recall earlier in this chapter the thought experiment of Hercules, our incredibly strong man. He was strong enough to easily lift a 10,000 pound stone, but not if it was covered in an extremely slippery substance. If the stone was covered in the slippery substance, it would still make sense for us to say he was strong enough to lift the stone. None of Hercules' strength left him just because the stone was covered by the slippery substance. Yet he nonetheless lost the ability to lift the stone.

Similarly, when God promises not to destroy the earth again with a flood, its not as if he no longer possesses the raw power to perform such a task. God surely still has the power to create as many drops of water as he desires, and he surely has the power to let gravity and other natural laws act on those drops of water in a normal way. However, despite this fact, it is still impossible for God to destroy

the earth again with a flood. To connect this with our Hercules example, God still has the strength needed to lift the stone, but God has purposefully covered the stone in the slippery substance of his perfect goodness. Thus, though none of his strength has left him, God cannot so much as lift a pebble that has been covered by his perfect goodness. This is how I understand Christ's statement in the passage being discussed. It is an expression of both what he has the raw power to do, and what he must allow in order to fulfill the promises made to mankind. This interpretation seems plausible enough to me and thus seems to provide an escape from those who would try to use such a passage against kenotic Christology.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined how one can affirm that Christ emptied himself of abilities and knowledge at the incarnation while also affirming that Christ never ceased to be omnipotent or omniscient. This was done by drawing attention to how these terms are defined and the implications of God's ability to make a restricting promise. I have provided philosophical and biblical justification for this proposal and addressed two potential avenues of objection. While both this path and the trinitarian path discussed in the previous chapter could be taken in isolation, I believe they are strongest when taken together. In addition to showing that Jesus could still be omnipotent/omniscient under a kenotic Christology, this path also provides a mechanism for how Christ performs this emptying. This strengthens the trinitarian path which on its own provides no such explanation. Similarly, the trinitarian path provides important clarifications about how we distinguish between properties possessed by individual persons of the Trinity and properties possessed by the Trinity as a whole. The final chapter of this work will briefly discuss what positive benefits the church can enjoy from these ideas.

Chapter Four

Implications for The Church

Introduction

The previous chapters of this work have been dedicated to defending kenotic Christology on philosophical and biblical grounds. The goal of this chapter is to defend kenotic Christology (and this work) on pragmatic grounds. One might have read this far only to be thinking "Why should I care? What use is all of this to the Christian sitting in the pew on a Sunday morning?" I must begin by confessing that these questions leave me with some confusion. I believe that the more we see of God, the more we will desire him. The more we desire God, the better we will serve him. I believe that there is no such thing as useless or unimportant knowledge when it comes to the work of our savior. Any glimpse, no matter how small, is worth pursuing. If the only effect this work has on the life of the church is to cause some of its members to sit for a few moments in silent contemplation of our king, then I will consider this project a success. Nonetheless, I will draw my reader's attention to two areas where I believe this work can have pragmatic implications. The first of these is exegetical in nature, and the second of which is ideological in nature.

Exegetical Implications

The first practical benefit provided in this work is that it gives the church an easier response to passages which depict Jesus as being limited in either knowledge or power. When discussing his second coming, Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 13:32 that "concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." Opponents of Christianity have often cited this verse as evidence against the deity of Christ, and Christian responses to this verse have often left much to be desired. I will briefly survey four non-kenotic interpretations of this passage and discuss issues in these interpretations. I will then show how kenotic Christology offers a better path forward.

The Subliminal Approach

William Lane Craig has offered an interpretation of this verse which he believes avoids kenotic implications. However, before addressing Craig's interpretation of this verse we should briefly discuss his understanding of the incarnation in a more general sense. Craig has postulated that Christ was omniscient in the sense that he had all knowledge, but that most of his knowledge was in his unconscious or subliminal mind. Craig remarks:

> Even though the Logos possesses all knowledge about the world from quantum mechanics to auto mechanics, there is no reason to think that Jesus of Nazareth would have been able to answer questions about such subjects, so low had he stooped in condescending to take on the human condition.[1]

Regarding Christ's professed ignorance, Craig says:

1. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 609.

> Clearly, on my model I want to say that he does have this knowledge in his subconscious. So I would interpret his statement, "I don't know the date of my return" as being an expression of what is in his conscious knowledge. It would be a way of giving a kind of phenomenal report, "I don't know when I am coming again." But it would have been deep in the subconscious, if either the Father had allowed it to come out or he had been able to reach down and grab it. So, I would say that, with a statement like that, don't overload it with too much theological freight. I think he is just giving a report of what he is aware of. "Yeah, I don't know," he is saying.[2]

In an interview in which Craig is pressed on the fact that the biblical text does not make this distinction, Craig is asked if this is problematic for his view. Craig responds:

> No, it would just require us to say that the historical Jesus isn't speaking here as a philosopher of religion. I think it's perfectly legitimate to say or to understand him as saying "I'm not aware of the date of my second coming." I think to try to draw a philosophical distinction between awareness and knowledge here wouldn't be good Christology from below.[3]

With these remarks in mind, I will begin by offering a general critique of Craig's view of Christ's omniscience followed by a critique of his interpretation

2. William Lane Craig, "Doctrine of Christ (Part 8)," *Reasonable Faith*, October 2011, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-2/s2-doctrine-of-christ/doctrine-of-christ-part-8 .

3. *A Discussion on the Incarnation & Neo-Apollinarianism | Crash Course Apologetics*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pws3X5NBb4 , 49:50.

of Christ's profession of ignorance. I will begin my critique with a thought experiment.

Consider Dave, who is a normal guy. He has a good job, a loving wife, a dog that makes him angry, and a couple of kids who are growing like weeds. However, while Dave is driving home from work late one Friday night, he is involved in a car accident which sends him to the hospital. The most serious of Dave's injuries involves a nasty blow to the head, which has the doctors concerned. To everyone's relief, Dave's eyes flicker open to see his family gathered around his bed. However, Dave's face is one of confusion. Dave recognizes neither the location, nor those around him. In fact, Dave can't recall the accident, where he works, or even his own name! Dave's blow to the head seems to have given him a case of amnesia. If we were to be around Dave and his family, we might hear Dave's wife tearfully saying to her friends, "We have been together for twenty years, and he doesn't even know who I am!" We might hear Dave's kids telling the school counselor "Yesterday, I had to help my dad learn how to tie his shoes." We might see Dave desperately try to remember a friend's face before sighing with frustration and saying, "I am sorry, I just don't know who you are."

This type of scenario should not be difficult to imagine, as we see it all the time in movies, books, and television shows. I think in this scenario we would all agree that Dave really did lose some knowledge. However, suppose that an overzealous theology student visits Dave and his family for dinner after he gets out of the hospital. While describing the challenges of living with his amnesia, Dave is constantly interrupted by the overzealous theology student who keeps saying "That's wrong, you didn't lose any knowledge! You don't need to relearn anything! All the knowledge you had is still in your soul somewhere, so stop saying that you don't know these things!"

That student would be lucky to leave dinner before being throttled, but it doesn't appear that this response is much different than Craig's attempt to explain how Jesus was omniscient while also maintaining that he didn't "know" things. Craig does not commit himself to any position regarding whether Christ

was able to access this subliminal knowledge or not, so I will briefly consider both possibilities in this area and reflect on how they affect his model.

Let us suppose that Christ was unable to access this subliminal knowledge. In this scenario, we could have a fully conscious Jesus Christ sitting in front of us who has no awareness of what quantum mechanics is. If we asked him about quantum mechanics, he would be unable to answer our question and would honestly respond with "I don't know." In this scenario, are we really to believe that Christ still had knowledge of quantum mechanics? This feels a lot like our overzealous theology student telling Dave that he is wrong for saying he doesn't know things. If Craig wants to affirm that Christ really knows about quantum mechanics in this scenario, he is welcome to hold that position. However, I will simply note that it seems like Craig is mutilating the meaning of "know" to preserve his model, and that he should therefore be careful about what objections he uses against the proponent of kenotic Christology.

Maybe Craig would say that Christ had this knowledge accessible to him so that at any moment he could access the wealth of knowledge that was underneath the surface. This option at least resembles a more everyday use of knowledge. As I type this, I am not actively aware of most of my classmates from high school. However, if I directed my attention to the task, I am confident I could create a modest list, and thus it makes sense to say that I have knowledge of those people.

However, while this option would entail that Christ had omniscience, it would also entail that Christ was wrong when he said he did not know the hour of his coming. Whether Craig believes Christ could access the subliminal knowledge or not, Craig has defined knowledge in such a way that to know something means to have it in one's soul somewhere. Very well, Christ said he did not know the hour of his coming which means (according to the understanding provided by Craig) he did not have this knowledge in his soul anywhere. As a result, Craig's idiosyncratic understanding of knowledge may alleviate the issues with his idea of Christ's subliminal mind, but it only magnifies his issues when it comes to Christ's profession of ignorance.

However, Craig is not without a response for this objection. When assessing Christ's profession of ignorance, he can simply adopt a new understanding of knowledge! When interpreting Mark 13:32, "knowledge" no longer means having knowledge somewhere in one's mind, it now means being consciously aware of the information. Thus, Craig simply flips back and forth between definitions of knowledge depending on the situation. This type of flippant redefining of one's terms in order to defend one's view is unimpressive to say the least.

However, several larger issues arise based on Craig's response to Christ's confession of ignorance. Recall that when pressed on the fact that Christ explicitly said he didn't have knowledge, Craig responded by simply saying that Christ was not speaking as a philosopher of religion. If Craig thinks this is a sufficient response to the critiques raised against him, its difficult to see how Scripture can ever be of use to us in our theological reflections. At any point in which theologians come across a Scripture which contradicts their view, they can simply hand waive it away by noting that the author was not a philosopher of religion. If theologians believe that Jesus is not divine, they can respond to verses which suggest otherwise by simply saying that Luke, John, and Paul were not writing as philosophers of religion. If one believes in the moral permissibility of some scripturally prohibited act, they can simply note that Paul and Moses were not speaking as professional ethicists.

Not only do Craig's remarks set a precedent for disregarding Scripture when it conflicts with our philosophical reflections, his remarks also don't make sense in general. If my wife asks me what the weather is like and I tell her it's raining, I am not in that moment speaking as a meteorologist. If my friend asks me how the stock market is doing today and I tell him that the DOW is up three points, I am not at that moment speaking as an economist. If I tell somebody that my mother developed a cancerous tumor in her esophagus which prevented her from being able to eat, I am not in that moment speaking as an oncologist. However, in all these instances it would be insane to brush off my statements as not being literally true representations of the world. I don't have to be speaking as a meteorologist to communicate that it is raining any more than Christ

needs to be a philosopher of religion in order to convey that he doesn't know something. Is Craig suggesting that he, as a philosopher of religion, knows more about the mind of Christ than Christ himself? Is Craig's armchair philosophy on the nature of the incarnation to be preferred over Christ's own testimony? The audacity of Craig's argument is staggering.

I will conclude my remarks on Craig's interpretation by asking a simple question. If Christ had no qualms with saying that he lacked knowledge, and the authors of the gospels had no qualms with recording these remarks, why do philosophers of religion have a problem with it? If Christ had no qualms expressing his incarnate state to the common man in this way, why should we? The overwhelming majority of Christians on this earth (and the overwhelming majority of those we share the gospel with) are not philosophers of religion. Christ delivered his teachings to fishermen, farmers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and the poor. When Christ called his disciples to follow him, he did not call students from the Greek or Jewish academies. Jesus called common men and women. It was common people that he chose to serve as the beachhead for the kingdom of God and it was to them that he plainly conveyed his ignorance. If we are to follow Christ's example, we must not demand that common people accommodate the scholars. Rather, we must demand that scholars accommodate common people.

Awareness Instead of Knowledge

Andrew Loke has also presented an interpretation of Jesus' claim to ignorance that seeks to avoid a lack of knowledge. To understand Loke's position regarding Jesus' claim to ignorance, one needs to understand what he means by the word "preconscious" and how he employs this term in his model of the incarnation. As you are reading this work, you are likely not thinking of your mother's maiden name or of what you did last Saturday. These facts are known to you, but you were not consciously aware of these facts until I mentioned them in the previous sentence. This knowledge was not in your subconscious or

unconscious, as those are areas of your mind which you don't have access to. However, you do have access to the knowledge about what you did last Saturday, as is evident from the fact that you likely became aware of this knowledge when I initially mentioned it. Loke would say that prior to my remarks, your knowledge of what you did last Saturday was in your preconscious, and that this knowledge was shifted from your preconscious mind to your conscious mind as you became aware of it. "Preconscious" is to represent the set of beliefs and knowledge that is accessible to us, but not immediately the object of awareness.[4]

Loke refers to his model of the incarnation as the "Divine Preconscious Model" because in it this idea of the preconscious is heavily utilized. Loke postulates that Christ's omniscience was in his preconscious during the incarnation in a similar way to how our various beliefs are in our preconscious when we are not directly aware of them. Christ had control over what came into his conscious mind from his preconscious mind, and Christ simply chose not to draw on the knowledge that he had in his preconscious. Though Christ always had access to it, he refrained from accessing it in order to share in our limited experiences. When Christ "learns," or "grows in wisdom," things are being shifted from a preconscious part of his mind to a conscious part of his mind. With this understanding of Loke's model firmly in our conscious awareness, consider Loke's remarks regarding Mark 13:32:

> With respect to the apparent ignorance of the day of the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:32), it should be noted that the Greek word οἶδεν – which is translated as 'know' in this passage and also in the parallel passage in Matt. 24:36 – means 'to have realized, perceived, to know'.(sic) It is often used in the New Testament in a general way, e.g. to know a person, to be able to understand/ apprehend/recognize (TDNT vol.5, 116–19). Therefore, in view of its semantic range, in these passages οἶδεν

4. Andrew Loke, *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation (Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies)* (Routledge, 2014), 55.

> can be legitimately rendered as 'aware'. Thus, Mark 13:32 can be read as 'But of that day or hour no one is aware, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.' This reading fits the context perfectly: the disciples would be hoping that the Son would reveal to them the day, but no one can reveal what he/she is not aware of. This reading (including the knowledge of the day of the coming of the Son of Man) into conscious awareness, so as to share in our conscious experiences of having limited awareness of truths and also to grow in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52; see below).... For our purposes here, it is important to note that such unawareness of the Son can coexist with omniscience in the same person because, as noted previously, omniscience does not require a constant unlimited conscious awareness of all truths known.[5]

Put simply, Loke understands Jesus not "knowing" the day or hour as Jesus not having this knowledge in his immediate conscious awareness. Just as you were not immediately consciously aware of what you did last Saturday before you started reading this section, Christ was not aware of the hour of his second coming. Just as you had knowledge of what you did last Saturday in your preconscious, Christ had knowledge of his second coming in his preconscious.

While I applaud Loke's creativity, his interpretation of Mark 13:32 should serve as a textbook example to seminary students of how not to engage in exegesis, as Loke is inconsistent in his use of words and anachronistic in his application of them to the text. Before I begin explaining this issue in depth, it's important to illustrate an important principle to follow when interpreting Scripture.

Suppose that you are at a grocery store one day and you overhear a woman saying to her friend "Our cat is so big, it just sits on a mat all day and doesn't use much energy." How should one interpret this? One interpretation is that the

5. Ibid, 118.

woman owns a four-legged feline pet, and that this pet sits on something like a yoga mat or welcome mat all day and therefore does not burn many calories. However, there are other ways of interpreting this. "Matt" is sometimes used as a proper name, so perhaps the woman was saying her feline pet sits on a man bearing this name all day. However, "CAT" is also a common shorthand for certain pieces of large construction equipment. Perhaps she is saying that she possesses one of these pieces of equipment and her comment about it "not using much energy" is in reference to how efficient it is with fuel consumption. Or, maybe when you heard "cat" she was really saying "CATT" and was referring to a Combined Arms Tactical Trainer which is used to train soldiers on a virtual battlefield.

These are all ways of interpreting what was heard in the grocery store. However, if we are trying to decide what the woman meant to convey with her sentence, these interpretations are not all equal. "Cat" is most commonly used to refer to a feline creature and very few grocery shoppers own large construction equipment or are engaged in training military units. Because of this, we should interpret the woman's words as referring to a feline creature. This may seem obvious, but this basic principle seems to be absent in the methodology of theologians such as Loke. These theologians think that so long as they can create an interpretation (no matter how improbable), they are in the clear. However, this is theologically unacceptable, as for any seemingly clear verse we find in Scripture, there is always some way of interpreting it in a different manner. If simply positing a different interpretation is sufficient to avoid issues in own's theory, then Scripture offers no value in theological insight. How can Scripture serve as a guardrail for our theology if we can simply move those guard rails whenever we please by creating ad-hoc interpretations of the text?

With this concern in mind, lets begin by assessing Loke's rhetorical strategy for dealing with Mark 13:32. Loke notes that the word for "know" in Mark 13 has a semantic range which allows us to use "aware" when translating it. However, we should pause here and make an important clarification. It is only acceptable to translate this as "aware" instead of "know" because in our everyday vernacular we often use these words as synonyms. If you get pulled over by a

police officer and are told that your taillights are out, you might respond "I didn't know they were out" or "I was not aware they were out" to convey the same concept.

However, suppose you noticed last week that your taillights were out, and you just haven't bothered to fix them. When you get pulled over, if you said, "I was not aware they were out," That would be a lie. If one of your passengers were to accuse you of lying in this scenario (perhaps because they heard you mention your broken taillights last week) it would not avail you to say "Oh, well, when I said "aware" I meant that I was not consciously thinking about it while driving. I didn't mean that it was not in my preconscious mind at all." Your passenger would likely accuse you of using "aware" in a contrived and idiosyncratic way. Not only that, but they may also point out that the only reason you were using it in this idiosyncratic way is because you knew the officer would interpret it in the more common way. If you thought the officer would understand your comment to be in reference to your preconscious, it wouldn't help you get out of the ticket! You were counting on the common use to help you.

This is exactly what Loke has done in his interpretation of Mark 13:32. Few of us are likely to object to "aware" being substituted for "know" because we already use these terms in overlapping ways in our everyday life. However, after "aware" has been substituted, Loke then switches the meaning from the common way that we use the word to his idiosyncratic use regarding what is in the conscious vs preconscious. He then utilizes his idiosyncratic understanding of "aware" to do all the heavy lifting in his interpretation of Mark 13:32.

Not only is this fallacious and misleading, it is also painfully anachronistic. Loke has concocted his interpretation through the use of modern concepts in psychology and philosophy, and he then imports this meaning backwards into the mouth of Christ and into the understanding of the audience. It is overwhelmingly improbable that Mark 13:32 is to be interpreted in the manner that Loke describes, as his view involves interpreting the words of Christ through a lens that is completely foreign to how the words were commonly used in the culture in which they were spoken. As previously noted, this use is even foreign to how these words are used now! Loke's interpretation is thus

untenable for any Christian wanting to preserve faithfully Christ's intended message.

My reader might object that I am being overly rigid in my understanding of Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32. In response to this objection, I will merely note that exegetical scholarship lends support to my position. BDAG lists both Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 as instances in which the Greek word οἶδα means "know about something,"[6] while TDNT remarks, "In most of the 320 passages where οἶδα occurs it has the sense to 'know' as indicated above, and only rarely is it interchangeable with related senses of 'know,' e.g., knowing a person."[7]

Additionally, my understanding is represented in a number of critical commentaries. While discussing Matthew 24:36, Craig Blomberg states bluntly:

> Here we have a limitation on his omniscience. Christians who balk at the implications of this verse reflect their own docetism (the early Christian heresy of not accepting the full humanity of Jesus) and lack a full appreciation for the extent of God's condescension in the incarnation and in the various human limitations he took upon himself. The textual variant noted in the NIV margin probably reflects a similar docetism among some early copyists.[8]

R. T. France remarks:

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6. Bauer, Danker, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* 693.

7. Heinrich Seesemann, "Οἶδα," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, (Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 117.

8. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture,* vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Holman Reference, 1992), 315

It is ironic that a saying which has such far-reaching christological implications has in fact become more familiar in theological discussion as a christological embarrassment. The assertion of Jesus' ignorance on a subject of such importance as the time of his own parousia seems to many incompatible with his status as Son of God. If this title implies that he is himself divine, and God is omniscient, how can the Son of God be ignorant? More specifically, if this is a matter which the Father does know and the Son does not, must we conclude that to be Son of God means something less than full participation in the divine attributes? Even to express these questions directly is to be aware immediately of a change of context. This is the language of later Christian theological debate, not of the gospel of Mark. Whatever later readers may have made of it, Jesus' 'confession of ignorance' seems to pose no embarrassment or even surprise for Mark. Perhaps he had not as yet made as tight a link between the title 'Son of God' and the claim to full divinity as was developed in later incarnational theology. Or perhaps he would have felt comfortable with what many centuries later was to be formulated as kenotic christology, the belief that when God becomes incarnate it is inappropriate to expect such divine attributes as omniscience to be evident within the temporary confines of an authentically human existence. We cannot know how he would have responded to these later questions, and it is likely that this issue, and the embarrassment which it brings to his text at 13:32, would not yet have occurred either to him or to his readers.... The focus of v. 32 is not on christology, but on eschatology. Unlike the thoroughly predictable end of the temple, the time of Jesus' parousia is known only to God. Even the Son himself, who might most have been expected to share the secret, does not know. The situation calls, therefore, not

> for calculation of dates or careful observation of signs, but for constant readiness.[9]

This final sentence by France is important, as it provides a connection between Jesus' claim of ignorance and an implication of it. William Lane similarly highlights that "Correctly understood, the qualification 'nor the Son' indicates that even Jesus had to live by faith and to make obedience and watchfulness the hallmark of his ministry."[10] This indication strengthens the command for the disciples to stay vigilant, as Craig Evans notes, "If Jesus and the angels of God do not know when the end time will come, then certainly his disciples or any self-styled prophets do not know (see v 33)."[11]

Unfortunately, instead of recognizing the significance of his statement, many early church writers opted to deny the veracity of Jesus' words or to construct contrived explanations to avoid their meaning. Joel Marcus's comments on this point are comprehensive and worth quoting at length:

> Jesus' apparent denial of knowledge about the day and hour of the end was felt to be a severe problem by later orthodox theologians; as Jerome (*Commentary on Matthew* 4) puts it, our verse makes "Arius and Eunomius rejoice," because it seems to support their position that the Son is inferior to the Father. Seemingly in response to this Christological problem, Luke leaves out all of Mark 13:32, and some later manuscripts... omit "nor the Son" from our passage and frequently from its Matthean parallel (it is absent in the Vulgate, most Syriac

9. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2002), 516.

10. William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1974), 279

11. Craig Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, vol. 34b, Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 432.

and Coptic witnesses, and the Majority Text; the omission, moreover, is already attested by Origen; see Ehrman, *Textual Corruption*, 91–92). For similar reasons, some church fathers assert unconvincingly that "nor the Son" was not part of the original text but had been introduced into it by the Arians (see, e.g., Ambrose, *On Faith* 5.16.191–93; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 4). The phrase "nor the Son," however, was too firmly rooted in Christian memory to be dealt with in this cavalier manner, so other hermeneutical strategies became necessary. As Luz (*Matthew*, 3.213–14) notes, later church interpreters are almost unanimous in claiming, on the basis of passages such as Matt 11:27; John 10:15; 16:15; and Acts 1:7, that Jesus did know the time of the end (cf. the survey in Oden and Hall, 191–93, and especially the fascinating article by Madigan, "Christus Nesciens"). After all, he knew the signs of the future judgment, so he must have known its day and hour as well (see, e.g., Ambrose, *Exposition of Luke* 8.35; *On Faith* 5.16.206–7). Many, like Augustine (*On the Trinity* 1.12.1), assert that the meaning of the verse is that although Jesus himself knew the "hour," he withheld knowledge of it from his disciples. One of most common proof texts is Acts 1:7, "It is not for you [disciples] to know the times or periods": Christ does not say, "It is not for me to know" but "... not for you to know," implying that he himself does know (see Ambrose, *On Faith* 5.17.212; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 4; Augustine, *Question* 60). A less frequent solution is that of Athanasius (*Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.46), who claims that Christ knew the hour in his divine nature but not in his human one. These interpretations all fly in the face of the plain sense of the verse, but for orthodox theologians it was "simply not imaginable that the text could mean what it states, nor could Jesus mean what he explicitly declares" (Madigan,

> "Christus Nesciens," 261). As the Arians realized, however, and as theologians in our own day have rediscovered, the admission of ignorance in Mark 13:32 has its own theological importance; Ebeling (*Dogmatik* 2.473), for example, understands Jesus' ignorance of the day and hour as a necessary part of his participation in the limitations of human existence.[12]

Ezra Gould likewise says regarding Mark13:32, "This denial of omniscience to the Son has caused all manner of theological tinkering," but that "the statement need create no surprise in those who accept the statement of our Lord's humanity, especially when it is accompanied by statements of this particular limitation of his humanity."[13] James Brooks notes regarding these statements, "One need not be embarrassed about them. Ignorance of certain things was simply a part of Jesus' humanity, a part of his becoming a real human being."[14]

I will conclude these remarks by noting that some commentators have noticed the cohesion and explanatory power that kenotic Christology provides in understanding Jesus' claim of ignorance. Donald Hagner observes:

> What is so remarkable in the present verse is the statement that "neither the angels of heaven nor the Son (οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός)" know the time of the Parousia. It is little wonder that many copyists (here as in the Markan Parallel) omitted this reference to the ignorance of the Son as seemingly incompatible with the Christology of the early church. The omniscience of the

12. Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2009), 913-914.

13. Ezra Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, International Critical Commentary (Scribner's Sons, 1922), 254.

14. James Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 23, New American Commentary (Holman Reference, 1991), 217-218.

> Son, however, is not a requirement of Matthew's very high Christology, and the ignorance of the Son on a matter such as this is compatible with the development of a kenosis doctrine (i.e, an "emptying" of divine prerogatives) such as Paul (Phil 2:6-8) and his predecessors had already developed - and with which Matthew, with his embracing of the full humanity of Jesus, would no doubt have been quite comfortable.[15]

To Make Known

Another way to interpret Jesus' claim of ignorance is to propose that Jesus was not saying the Son does not know the hour, but that the Son simply does not make the day or hour known. Timothy Pawl has been a recent proponent of this interpretation. Pawl remarks:

> Third, and more traditional, is the attempt to deny that such passages really require ignorance. We find this variety of response in Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, and Thomas Aquinas, to name just some thinkers who support this method of response.... Concerning the passage from Mark, these authors distinguish between the state of knowing and the revelatory act of making known. Christ here, they claim, intends to say that he does not make known the hour. As a parallel, some, like Aquinas (*Comp. Theo.* 242), note that God says to Abraham after the potential sacrifice of Isaac, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12). Aquinas argues that this does not mean that God went from ignorance to knowing

15. Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33b, Word Biblical Commentary (Zondervan, 2018), 716.

> that Abraham feared him. Rather, God was declaring it made known that Abraham feared him.[16]

As one might guess, I find this interpretation unsatisfying and improbable. The first objection to raise against this interpretation is that it is simply not what the text says, and it employs an idiosyncratic use of the word "know." If somebody is asked a question, and they respond "I don't know," that response is usually understood as conveying a lack of knowledge, not a refusal to make something known. If I ask my wife where the car keys are located, and she replies, "I don't know," should I get angry with her for refusing to make this fact known to me? I suspect most people would recognize that this is an improper response. This is improper because her response clearly indicated that she lacked the knowledge I requested and there is nothing in it which implied a refusal to convey knowledge which she has available. Like the previous interpretations, this attempt requires us to interpret Jesus' words by shunning the normal, colloquial understanding of the statement and instead importing a contrived and idiosyncratic usage that would have been no more acceptable in Jesus' day than ours. Like the other interpretations, this understanding does not arise from one letting Scripture speak for itself but from twisting the meaning of Scripture to fit a theological model.

The second objection to raise against this understanding is that it does not make sense in context, as Stephen Nemes notes:

> But this is an implausible suggestion. On the one hand, the verb "know" (*oiden*) at Matt. 24:36 and Mark 13:32 cannot mean "make known" in this context insofar as that is plainly not what Christ has in mind in his later exhortations: "Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know (*ouk oidate*)" (Matt. 24:42/Mark 13:35). On the other hand, interpreting the verb "know" as

16. Timothy Pawl, *The Incarnation*, Elements in the Philosophy of Religion (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 33.

> "make known" undermines the force of Jesus's words. Jesus says that no one knows the day and the hour except the Father. Suppose this means that no one makes the day and hour known except the Father. This assertion would nevertheless be logically consistent with the Son's knowing, the angels' knowing, and even the disciples' knowing in the sense of possessing awareness of the day and the hour. It is just that none of these persons make the day and the hour known. But there would be no basis for Jesus to exhort his disciples to vigilance and watchfulness in the first place if all he meant to say is that no one except the Father will make the day and the hour known. Nothing about the fact that the Father alone makes the day and the hour known would motivate a call to vigilance—unless of course it were paired with the idea that the Father alone knows in the ordinary sense of the word. This interpretation therefore has little plausibility.[17]

While Pawl can certainly provide a list of early fathers who employ this strategy, Nemes rightfully notes that Irenaeus of Lyons (an even earlier father) saw no issue with Christ's claim of ignorance. Irenaeus writes:

> Even the Lord, the very Son of God, allowed that the Father alone knows the very day and hour of judgment, when He plainly declares, "But of that day and that hour knows no man, neither the Son, but the Father only." If, then, the Son was not ashamed to ascribe the knowledge of that day to the Father only, but declared what was true regarding the matter, neither let us

17. Steven Nemes, "Jesus's Confession of Ignorance and Consubstantiality," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 8 (1), (June 25, 2024): 13.

> be ashamed to reserve for God those greater questions which may occur to us. For no man is superior to his master.[18]

Some have tried to bolster the "make known" strategy by appealing to 1 Corinthians 2:2 in which Paul says he "decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The argument is that Paul uses the same Greek word for "know" here to refer to his teaching, therefore we can use that meaning with Mark13:32 as well. This strategy does not work for several reasons. First, there is no reason to think that "know" in this verse means "to make known." Perhaps one would respond by saying, "Surely Paul did not ONLY know Christ was crucified, he knew lots of other things as well! He knew how to clean his dishes, write a letter, put on his sandals, so on and so forth. Thus, this should be understood as not being about what he literally knew, but what he literally taught." This sounds reasonable until one realizes that the "make known" interpretation has the same issue. Does anybody really think that Paul walked into Corinth, proclaimed that Jesus died, and then mentioned nothing about his resurrection? Of course not, Paul surely taught the Corinthians many theological truths other than just the fact that Jesus died. If Paul only "made known" Jesus' death, the Corinthians would no doubt have wondered what all the excitement was about.

Once this issue is recognized, we realize that the "make known" interpretation of this verse loses its main claim to value. The "make known" interpretation was supposed to get around problems with a literal straightforward reading of the text, yet we see that it faces similar obstacles. With this in mind, why should we abandon the usual usage of "know" in this text? I will conclude this section by noting that *even if* the objector is correct about Paul's use of this word in 1 Corinthians 2:2, it would not necessarily

18. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1913), https://archive.org/details/antenicenefather01robe/page/400/mode/2up , 401.

save the "make known" interpretation of Mark 13:32. Paul is a completely different speaker than Jesus, and his use of this word occurs in a different context than Jesus' statement in Mark and Matthew. Even if Paul did mean "to make known," that wouldn't mean that we can simply import his meaning anywhere we like throughout the New Testament. Most words have a semantic range which allows for various meanings, but one cannot simply find any meaning they wish and then plug it in wherever one wants regardless of the content. As already noted, the "make known" interpretation does not fit the context of Jesus' statement.

Ignorant Only in Respect to Nature

A final strategy for dealing with this verse is to admit that it does depict actual ignorance on the part of Christ, but that it is only in reference to Christ's human nature. A proponent for this understanding would argue that Christ was omniscient in respect to his divine nature, but ignorant in respect to his human nature. Thus, Jesus' apparent claim to ignorance is in reference to merely his human nature. This strategy also faces insurmountable difficulties.

First, natures do not know things. Rather, persons know things. It makes no sense to say that X believes or is consciously aware of something unless X is a person. One might dispute this inference and claim that a non-person can have such states, but to such objections I will say that their understanding of "person" is so removed from our ordinary use of the word that that they have rendered the word meaningless. Second, even if natures can be said to know things while remaining non-persons, that doesn't help the proponent of this strategy for the following reasons.

First, Jesus specifically refers to the Son not knowing things, not to his human nature or divine nature. A proposition is being applied to the Son, not one of his natures. To try and rephrase this verse as applying to one of the Son's natures but not the other is to anachronistically import later Christological developments into the mouth of Christ with no scriptural support. The Son,

as a person, cannot both know the hour while also being ignorant of it, as this is a contradiction. Pawl thinks that he can deny a contradiction here by simply modifying the truth conditions under which a person can be said to know something. Pawl suggests that instead of having a truth condition such as "s is consciously aware of p just in case s has an occurrent mental state (of the right sort) of p," we can modify the truth condition to be "s is consciously aware of p just in case s has a nature that has an occurrent mental state (of the right sort) of p."[19]

What might one say in response to this? I would begin by noting that it is far from clear that a nature is the type of thing (if it exists) which can have mental states at all. However, looking past that, one might respond by pointing out that it is indeed easy to avoid contradictions when one is willing to redefine truth conditions willy nilly. Pawl defends his maneuver against the charge of being ad-hoc by noting that he has performed a similar rhetorical move when discussing impassability. However, the fact that Pawl redefined terms in ad-hoc way on a previous issue does not clear him from being ad-hoc in this instance.

Imagine I came up to you and I said, "I have a friend named Stan who is a married bachelor." You would likely scoff at this statement and point out that this is a contradiction, as a person being married entails that they have at least one spouse, while a person being a bachelor implies that they have none. Thus, Stan cannot be both. Suppose I replied "No, you see, you are using the wrong truth conditions. Stan is a bachelor so long as he has a nature which lacks a spouse, and Stan is married so long as he has a nature which possesses a spouse. Stan is very special in that unlike most people he has two natures and thus the issue is resolved." Is anybody convinced by this? It is difficult for me to see how Pawl's strategy is any less absurd.

Superiority of the Kenotic Response

This has not been an exhaustive survey of interpretations of Jesus' ignorance claim, but I believe it is representative of what most non-kenoticists have argued.

Objections to Christianity often include the accusation that Christians twist the obvious meaning of Scripture and ignore what doesn't agree with orthodox doctrine. With this accusation in mind, consider the following interpretations and ask yourself which one is most likely to be seen as a Christian dodging the clear meaning of the text:

1. When Christ says he does not know the day or hour, you should not read too much into that as he was not speaking as a philosopher of religion. What he really meant was that he had knowledge somewhere down in his unconscious soul, but he just didn't have access to that knowledge.

2. When Christ says he does not know the day or hour, what he really meant was that he knew the day and hour, but he was not consciously thinking about that knowledge while he was speaking.

3. When Christ says that he does not know the day or hour, what he really means is that he is not going to reveal this information to his followers.

4. When Christ says he does not know the day or hour, what he really means is that his human nature does not know the day or our, but his divine nature does. Thus, Christ both knows the day and hour and also is ignorant of the day and hour.

5. When Christ says he does not know the day and hour, it's because he does not know the day and hour.

I encourage my readers to put themselves into the shoes of a Muslim or Jewish objector to Christianity. Which of these responses would give the impression that the Christian is engaging in intellectual dishonesty? When I hear Christians give the first four responses, I often find myself agreeing with the objector. It certainly appears to outsiders that the Christian is simply conjuring strained interpretations to defend their position and giving this impression is dangerous

and destructive to productive dialogue. If the Christian is just going to invent a contrived interpretation for any given verse, what is the point of dialoguing with them further? Dialogue can only be had when people are willing to engage in good-faith reasoning and follow the data where it leads. By using the first four responses, the Christian is saying to all around them "No matter how odd, improbable, or contrived it may sound, I will always find some way to maintain my position." In contrast, the kenotic position affirms the obvious. Instead of disputing the clear meaning of the text, the kenotic position calls into question our assumptions about omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, and the nature of divinity.

I believe this also has profound apologetic implications. If an objector tries to argue that God could never limit himself in any way (as many Muslims do), the Christian can use the strategies in the previous chapter to find common ground with their interlocutor. If a Muslim agrees that God is morally perfect and cannot break a promise, are they going to turn around and deny that its possible for God to make a promise? This seems unlikely, but the moment one's interlocutor grants that God can make promises which God cannot break, they are admitting that God can limit himself in significant ways. If one's interlocutor maintains that God is able to break his promises, the Christian can simply point out that Christianity has a superior view of God's goodness. I am not suggesting that one should regard kenotic Christology as true because of the above benefits. Rather, I am merely noting that the viability of kenotic Christology has a real advantage in how we respond to certain objections and engage in apologetic dialogue.

Ideological Implications

In addition to providing pragmatic benefits for exegesis and apologetics, the defense of kenotic Christology put forth in this work has potential implications on our ideological life. If one conceives of Christ's incarnation as being kenotic in nature, it magnifies the scope of what Christ gave up for us. For Christ to refuse to use his abilities or knowledge is one thing, but to bind himself in such a

way that he cannot use them is something far greater. The more that Christ gave up, the more his love for mankind is magnified. Kenotic Christology magnifies the love of Christ by refusing to downplay the scope of what he gave up in his decision to come and walk among us. In recognizing the extent of Christ's work in this way, we can find more solidarity with Christ when we go through our own tribulations. A cancer patient waiting for the doctor to come and tell them the results of their chemotherapy treatment can reflect on the fact that Christ also endured moments of unknowing anticipation and dread. Just like them, Christ was powerless to change his situation. This is vastly different from a Christ who merely pretends to be helpless as if he was a trickster god and not a companion in commiseration.

Similarly, when we struggle to trust in the good will of the Father in times of trouble, we can know that in his suffering Christ also had no option but to trust in the good will of the Father. We can thus look to Christ as an example of what it means to put one's faith completely and totally in the Father. When God tells us to trust him completely a kenotic incarnation shows that God is willing to put his money where his mouth is. This, in turn, magnifies our understanding of what true leadership, humility, and sacrifice looks like. The church has long recognized the idea of a servant leader and looked to Christ as the epitome of that form of leadership. If we recognize that Christ really gave up something significant in the incarnation, that inspires us to also be willing to give something up for those we are tasked with leading.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of this work is that it allows those who feel a natural draw towards kenotic Christology to follow their intuition where it leads. There are people who feel a strong spiritual power in the idea of Christ giving up certain privileges on our behalf. There are many who feel that Christ could not have been truly human if he did not empty himself of some abilities or knowledge. This work allows people who have such intuitions to embrace them without having to fear the objection that they are compromising Christ's deity.

I will humbly submit my own experience with kenotic Christology as an illustration of this final point. For most of my life prior to writing this work,

I have not held to kenotic Christology. Like many, I was taught that kenotic Christology entails uncomfortable implications about the deity of Christ. Despite this, I found kenotic Christology appealing for how simple it was. Those who reject kenotic Christology are welcome to jump through various hoops in order to explain how Christ really did know the hour of his coming despite his clear statement to the contrary. I am content to merely say that Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."[20]

20. Philippians 2:6-7

Chapter Five

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