

THE KENOSIS OF THE CREATOR AND OF THE CREATED CO-CREATOR

by *Manuel G. Doncel, S.J.*

Abstract. I comment on moral and theological aspects of human technology, which I consider as an evolutionary moment of our cultural and genetic variation. It is an important moment both scientifically and theologically. Starting from Philip Hefner's theological program of the human being as created co-creator, I distinguish between the limitations and responsibilities of the human being as a created agent and the possibilities and ideals as a co-creator. I develop the idea of the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of the Creator, which as the root of God's love principle should be reenacted by the created co-creators. I analyze elements of this kenosis presented by Jürgen Moltmann in relation to creation and eschatology.

Keywords: created co-creator; Creator's kenosis; cultures' rights; eschatology; global culture; Philip Hefner; human kenosis; image of God; laws of nature; love principle; Jürgen Moltmann; new creation; Trinity; zimzum.

I consider human technology to be an evolutionary moment of our cultural and genetic variation. Scientifically, it is an important moment of our global cosmobioevolution. Theologically, it becomes decisive in an eschatological perspective, that is, from the perspective that includes the final consummation of history. I start from Philip Hefner's theological program of the human being as created co-creator (Hefner 1989; 1993, chaps. 2, 4, 5; 2003). For my purposes I distinguish between the limitations and responsibilities of the human being as a created agent and the possibilities and ideals as a co-creator, created in the image of God. In what follows I develop the deep idea, hidden in the core of Hefner's program, of the Creator's *kenosis* (self-emptying), which constitutes the very root of God's

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love principle and should then be personally and socially reenacted by the created co-creators (Hefner 1989, 224, 228, 230). I analyze some elements of this kenosis that are presented by Jürgen Moltmann ([1985] 1993, 86–93; [1995] 1996, 292–95) in relation to creation and eschatology¹ and apply them to the technology of the human being as created agent and as co-creator.

THE KENOSIS OF THE CREATOR, ITS ELEMENTS,
AND ITS CESSATION

The Christian idea of *kenosis* (“self-emptying”) is conceptually and etymologically grounded in the New Testament hymn verse in Philippians 2:7: “Rather he [Jesus the Christ] emptied himself [*heauton ekenosen*], taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness” (NAB). This kenosis has been traditionally applied to the incarnated Logos,² but, under the Jewish influence of the mystical *zimzum*,³ the kenosis is now also applied in Christian theology to the Creator. This leads to the necessity of proposing a new concept of God: from primarily being absolute power, God is thought of as primarily absolute love (Balthasar 1969, §1.4).

Such a kenosis is characteristic of any love relation, which does not search for absorption or identification—that the other become more as myself—but for a relational unity presupposing diversity and integrity—that the other by his or her relation to me become more him- or herself (John Paul II 1990, M8, §18). So, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, this kenosis should be also presupposed to be intrinsic to the concept of God as Trinity (*ad intra*), in the eternal love relation of the divine Persons: each of them should respect and leave existential place to the others. And what we consider in God’s creation or incarnation is a manifestation of the same interpersonal kenosis in God’s external relations to the world (*ad extra*), in relation to the creatures.⁴

Thus, we can imagine the kenosis of the Creator as a self-restriction of divine being, freely realized in loving respect for the creatures that are to be created. Such self-restriction is required in order to offer to creatures metaphysical play, so that they can exist and act as autonomous created beings. To express it more concretely, prior to the decision to create the universe the Triune God freely decided to accept the position not to be the only existent; other beings different from God would also exist. Even if God remains the *necessary* condition of everything, God freely accepted being only one *sufficient* condition of every particular effect, because other beings different from God would also truly act (William R. Stoeger, in Russell, Murphy, and Peacocke 1995, 254). It follows that when a universe of physical and free personal creatures has been designed, with a special purpose for those creatures, this kenosis of the Creator will embody a whole variety of elements. For clarity, I classify these elements as belonging to three different levels: physical, moral, and eschatological.

Space-time and the Laws of Nature. The mystical self-restriction of Isaac Luria's zimzum seems to be spatial, but it is really metaphysical in character. With the decision to create a bodily and temporal universe, "God as eternal and omnipresent restrains Godself to allow creation to be, thereby giving it time and providing it with a habitat of its own" (Moltmann in Russell, Murphy, and Peacocke 1995, 206). Theologians say today that God becomes temporal, entering into the co-created time. If they think of the world expansion from an initial Big Bang, they consider God's omnipresence to increase over a span of 15 to 20 billion years to distances of as many light years.

Our cosmological and evolutionary models are based in the physical and biological laws discovered by modern sciences. An accurate analysis of the long process of cosmobioevolution yielded by these models discloses an immanent directionality, which can be scientifically explained and includes the role of chance, especially in the mechanism of genetic mutations (Stoeger in Russell, Stoeger, and Ayala 1998, 163–82).

Theologians today contemplate this long process as God's continued creation, mediated by the interplay of laws and chance. And already Karl Rahner elaborated philosophical views on causality, according to which the Creator, as required by the kenosis, totally respects the autonomy of this cosmobioevolution.⁵

Human Freedom and World Autonomy. The most momentous element of this Creator kenosis is related to our human actions, or actions of any free responsible beings, wherever they reside. To respect this freedom seems to require that God allows moral evil or sin—that is, allows creatures to react against the divine will. Denis Edwards makes this point when he writes, "Real freedom is the freedom to enter into love, to risk oneself with another. . . . And the trinitarian God is . . . free beyond comprehension to enter into the vulnerability of loving communion" (in Russell, Murphy, and Peacocke 1995, 165).

John Polkinghorne makes a parallel between the "free wills" of human agents and the "autonomous processes" of the world regulated by natural laws. Thus, he considers a new element of the Creator's kenosis, the fact that God allows the autonomous course of such world processes. This fact can throw new light on the problem of physical evil. As he graphically says, "God neither wills the act of a murderer nor the incidence of a cancer, but allows both to happen in a world which God has endowed with the ability to be itself" (in Russell, Murphy, and Peacocke 1995, 446).⁶

Eschatological Cessation of God's Kenosis. According to Moltmann, this kenosis is transitory ([1995] 1996, 294; [1989] 1993, 328–30). It began at the primordial moment of God's creative resolve with a divine self-restriction; it will cease at the end of time, that is, at the unpredictable eschatological moment of God's redemptive resolve, with a divine de-restriction

of self. This de-restriction supposes the glorious manifestation to the creation of God's being "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28) in an eschatological panentheism. Then it will no more be either space and time proper, or death and sin, but interpersonal loving of the created and trinitarian persons.

I wish to emphasize that, in this interpersonal life without evil and death, our laws of nature must also cease. Our "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15) can no more obey such physicochemical and bioevolutionary laws, on pain of producing death again. I find it therefore improper to elaborate a "physics of immortality" (Tipler 1994). These laws, although designed by the Creator, have to be thought as transitory.⁷ Laws governing the new creation will promote only the interpersonal human and divine relations.

God's Purpose for the Creation. This physical, moral, and eschatological character of the Creator's kenosis appears to us as love's endeavor, a work of love (Wanstone 1977; Polkinghorne 2001). The essence of the trinitarian God is love, which is exchanged among the divine Persons in an eternal intercommunication (*perichoresis*, circumincession). The new application of the divine kenosis intends to introduce a whole world of created persons within the being itself of God, amounting to an extended intercommunication of sorts. Such creatures should be designed with respectful tact so that they become persons, and they should also experience restoration from disorders.

For Christian theology, the function of designing created persons is the proper work of the Word/Wisdom, who is said to be "beside the Creator as his craftsman" and who "found delight in the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:30–31 NAB). Christ, being incarnated, perfectly realized this design as the "definitive Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Their restoration is the work of the Holy Spirit, who, forgiving sins (John 20:22–23) and reestablishing the interpersonal communion (*koinonia*), prepares the world for their eschatological assumption into the being of the trinitarian God (Doncel 2002).

The kenosis, eternally existing in the love relations among the divine Persons, was glorious and joyful. But it became vulnerable when it was related to contingent and indigent creatures who might respond to God's love with physical and moral evil. Thus, this vulnerable kenosis is God's act of patiently bringing into being creatures who are capable of being introduced into union with God. However, the vulnerable character of God's kenosis will come to an end, together with every physical and moral evil, at the point when these personal creatures are consecrated in indefectible love and living in interpersonal communication with God.

THE KENOSIS OF THE CREATED AGENT AS GOVERNED BY PROVIDENCE

If God works kenotically in the creation, far more should we do so as *techno sapiens*. We should do so as created agents—contingent, flawed,

and causing evil and vulnerability. As created, we are in all respects conditioned: in the ecosystem where we emerged, in the genome and culture we inherited, and in the human group to which we belong (Hefner 1993, 36–38). This belonging makes us truly responsible and also reveals that we are immature creatures on our planet; compare our culture of technosciences or that of *Homo habilis* (one hundred years old and two million years long, respectively) with the genetic experience of our planet (billions of years long). It is not strange that our planetary activity might produce ecological crises! We cannot replace God's providence but only learn from and follow it. We shall therefore think comprehensively about our limitations as human technicians, also from our three perspectives—the physical, the moral, and the eschatological.

Technical Limitations and Sustainability. Our first limitations are related to space-time. In spite of the growing speed in our communication and transmission techniques, our space dimensions are today planetary, practically the same as those of *Homo erectus* (1.6 million years ago), wandering from continent to continent. Only in the last generation have we attempted to pierce through a larger technological space. In spite of the rapidity in our electronic computation and mass production, it still takes decades of our active life for us to bring a personal technological project to fruition. We are dependent upon our culture and upon the programs past generations conceived and transmitted to us. This should remind us of our reciprocal obligation to future generations.

Other limitations on the planetary scale concern raw materials and energy. We are forced to consider using recyclable material and renewable energy resources. Of course, the whole is critically dependent on our provisional knowledge both of technology and of science (see Fernández-Rañada 2002).

Economic Exploitation of Human Rights and Ecological Rights. Being created rational and free, we feel responsible for the rights and well-being of our human group. But altruism toward our genetic and cultural group is really much less than it should be. Our belonging to the human group bestows on us special obligations toward our whole ecosystem. We should consider not only human but also ecological rights, grounded in our kinship within our evolutionary process.⁸ The solid reasons for caution in interfering with the ecosystem, in my opinion, are our ignorance of “the consequences of such interference in other areas” and respect for “the well-being of future generations” (John Paul II, in Edwards 1991, 116 n. 3).

The Transitory Character of our Technical Enterprises. As previously discussed, our laws of physics and biology are transitory; they have an unknown but finite life, until the consummation of history and the end of time, which theology terms “the eschatological moment.” Our technology,

founded on these laws, must then also be transitory. This assessment of faith is consonant with scientific predictions of the far future.⁹ Such an assessment should not bring us to a kind of disdain regarding our technical enterprises and their progress. The eschatological new creation will not be “out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*), as the original creation, but “out of the old creation” (*ex vetere*) in which we now live (Polkinghorne 1996, 166f.). Thus, the dimension of eternity is introduced into our technical activity, particularly if that activity is guided by the love principle. For instance, solidarity with the third world in order to find ways of sharing well-being will surely deserve eternal value (Matthew 25:35–36).

No Terrestrial Utopia, but World Autonomy and Eschatological Stimulus. By looking comprehensively over the last three sections, physical, moral, and eschatological in character, we recognize the ambivalence of our evolutionary human group. On one hand, we experience our impotence and selfishness in the face of the magnitude and the progressive directionality of the whole cosmobioevolution. On the other hand, we experience the richness of our human situation as the point in which this process has become conscious of itself as well as accountable to the wholeness of the world process.

God’s kenotic and purposeful creation transcends these scientific views. Christians hope for an eternal utopia, deeply rooted in faith in the resurrected Christ, which is not a terrestrial hope.¹⁰ Our final goal is not something we can reach or build by ourselves, as was wrongly conceived by Rousseau, who believed in the saving power of nature, or by Marx, who trusted in the social success of dialectical materialism. Our technical activity, although realized in the autonomous world that God’s kenosis rendered possible, is efficacious only insofar as it is supported by God’s transcendental action, which is to be humbly and graciously received.

Nevertheless, this by no means supposes that humanity and technology have no value in themselves. On the contrary, through God’s purpose for the creation, our activity includes in itself a value of eternity when realized in accord with this purpose. This constitutes a supreme Christian stimulus for technological activity. The Second Vatican Council, after acknowledging the rightful autonomy of the human social and scientific world, considers human activity in this eschatological perspective and exhorts, “Still our hopes of a new world should not lessen but stimulate our anxiety to improve the present world, where the new family is taking shape” (Vatican Council II 1965, §36 and §39.2).

THE KENOSIS OF THE CO-CREATOR AS IMAGE OF GOD CONSONANT WITH PROVIDENCE

As we have noted, kenosis marks the whole activity of the Creator as a work of love. It expresses the Creator’s love principle and God’s own self,

who is love (1 John 4:8–16). God practices this love principle with total universality: “Your heavenly Father . . . makes his sun rise on the bad and the good” (Matthew 5:45 NAB). This is the symbol of divine providence.

Because we are created in God’s image, we should imitate God. Our kenosis is an expression of the love principle and should also mark all human and technological activity as co-creators. We have in the past understood wrongly the biblical text about our dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28), and that misunderstanding is the result of our faulty idea of God and God’s dominion. We should learn from God’s lovingly self-restricting respect for all creatures and so follow the command to “cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden” (Genesis 2:15 NAB). In our ecological age, this means care for the whole earth, which we know now to be the kinswoman and mother that we have carelessly abandoned. At the very least, we should respect her as a very complex system of systems on which our future generations depend.

Let us again reflect on human technology at our three levels, but from this positive Christian perspective of consonance with God’s providence.

Mastering and Co-steering the World’s Evolution. In this kenotic spirit we should first strive to understand the mysteries of nature in all their depth and breadth, motivated by the most traditional view of God’s revelation and purpose. This means today to do scientific research to discover—in our poor mathematical expression—the as yet unknown laws governing the world (Stoeger in Russell, Murphy, and Isham 1993, 209–34). This scientific research should include the astrophysical extrapolation we call cosmology as well as the complex of molecular biology and neuroscience insofar as we think it competent to describe genetic-cultural evolution.

Only by strict attention to these laws of the evolving world can we undertake to steer it so that our planet can be hospitably preserved for all of its inhabitants.¹¹ If that proves impossible, we should steer the flight of all humankind to a more hospitable planet. Such are the thoughts we consider today as survival strategies for our future generations. These strategies should be incorporated into our human activity.

Universal Love Principle and the Rights of the World’s Cultures. The love principle, as it is implemented in our actual behavior, must begin by loving the neighbor whom we see (1 John 4:20). Who is our neighbor? Answering this precise question, Jesus taught that the neighbor might belong to hostile Samaritan countries (Luke 10:29–37). In our world of Internet and television, all the nations of the planet are our neighbors. But if we see ourselves within cosmobioevolution, our neighbor is any humanoid on whatever planet it inhabits, even though we may chiefly concern ourselves with future generations here on Earth.¹²

The central point of this kenotic interest is the development of human and social dimensions, perhaps also of our genetic good, through steering

of our culture. Genetically we are one species but culturally a plurality of contradictory cultures. We should defend each of them and their biodiversity by establishing the rights of the culture, not only the rights of the individual person. The universality of the love principle should embrace any human culture and all of its positive values, in spite of the threats that may attend a unification of cultures.

The Eschaton and the Globalization of Cultures. The eschatological concept of the kingdom of God and related biblical images¹³ point to what I call God's home, which is finally a home that is unified on the basis of free interpersonal connection. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin grandly imagined the last evolutionary moment of the "human phenomenon" as the "socialization of the noosphere." This consists in the formation of a kind of superorganism in which cellular individuality and specialization will not at all be lost but deeply enriched (Teilhard 1955, 289–92).¹⁴

The actual dynamism of unification, however, will bring—as historical invasions brought—a certain hybridization of cultures, regulated in the new spirit of natural selection that includes selection by human decision. Through such successive processes of hybridization, a global *techno sapiens* culture will begin to emerge.¹⁵ These processes should be inspired not by biased and wicked interests but by a truly geographical-historical love principle. According to this principle, global technological activity should manifest an organismic solidarity. It should not try to absorb all members into the lifestyle of the leading members, the elite, but kenotically acknowledge and enrich the lifestyles of all members of the world society. Such is the style of God's providence, which we as co-creators should imitate.

Collaborating with the Logos and the Spirit. In our kenotic role of co-creators we should collaborate to prepare our world, interpreted as kingdom of God, for its eschatological purpose. This purpose has been designed by God's Logos from the beginning and fully realized by this same incarnated Logos, Jesus of Nazareth, who "anointed with the holy Spirit" preached this coming kingdom and "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38 NAB; Edwards 1991, chap. 4) and by giving his life in obedience to the Father, and by his being "resurrected by the Spirit of holiness" (Romans 1:4) as a foreshadowing of the final resurrection.

In my opinion, our activity through sophisticated technoscience can only help us to do good by practicing the love principle in a more universal modern way. For that purpose, it is essential to be sacramentally "anointed by the Spirit," who, as the wind, "blows where it wills" (John 3:8 NAB) within cultures and religions. Only the Spirit can restore our broken world, bringing love and interpersonal life, and finally introducing the new creation into the very life of the interpersonal trinitarian God.

Rahner treated the topic of whether the consummation of our personal life and world activity is immanently realized by our own being and strengths

or is offered transcendentally to us from God's independent liberality. Recalling his conception of our spirit as openness to the transcendental Mystery and the directionality of the whole creation in its matter-spirit kinship toward the self-offering of this Mystery, he concludes that this consummation of our life and activity is at the same time both transcendental and immanent (Rahner 1967). This bespeaks the deepest expression of the definitive value of our human and technological activity. As was said in the Second Vatican Council, "Christians . . . are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness" (Vatican Council II 1965, §34.3).

NOTES

A version of this essay was delivered at the biannual meeting of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology at Nijmegen, Netherlands, April 2002.

1. This view of the divine kenosis can clarify God's purpose for the universe and its eternal destiny. It also questions the definitive role of prehuman processes of nature (see Hefner 1993, 73–74).

2. Traditional interpretations relate to the self-emptying of God's divine condition in the Incarnation (Käsemann 1950), but more recent Christologies think on the new Adam and his renunciation of incorruptibility, without supposing the preexistence (Dunn 1980, chap. 4).

3. This idea was developed in Galilee by Isaac Luria (1534–1572), working on the Kabbala (13th century, in Girona, Spain). *Zimzum* means concentration and contraction and, for Luria, signifies a withdrawing of God into himself, setting free a kind of "mystical primordial space" in which a world outside God is made possible (*creatio ex nihilo*) (Scholem 1954, 7th lecture; Moltmann [1985] 1993, 87).

4. This constitutes a new application of the "Rahner rule," that the "economic Trinity," manifested in the history of salvation, is the "internal Trinity" (Rahner 1960).

5. Arthur Peacocke illustrates the interplay of laws and chance with a musical image: The Creator is like a composer playing with a repetitive melody and unpredictable fugues. See Russell, Murphy, and Isham 1993, 140. According to Rahner, in this process of cosmbioevolution God does not exert "categorical" actions within the world but supplies only the "transcendental" action maintaining the world in its existence and activity. This is sufficient to explain the continuous emergence of new richness of being, in the frame of his view of causality as "dynamic self-transcendence." Because of the kinship of matter and spirit, it may be applied even to "homini-zation," or emergence of human, spiritual beings (Rahner 1961, 79–84). Recent theologians emphasize this view of causality as self-transcendence and see its divine dynamism as the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit (Edwards 1999, 90).

6. Polkinghorne systematically speaks of "free will" and "free process"; I believe that one should distinguish "free" proper and improper, and speak of "autonomous process."

7. Other much more fundamental elements of God's design have to be also considered as transitory, as, for instance, the theological virtues faith and hope according to Paul (1 Corinthians 13:8–13).

8. I believe, nevertheless, that the concern for biodiversity should not convert our planet into a living museum of its evolution, wild beasts and pathogenic microorganisms included.

9. In about 5 billion years' time, our dying sun is expected to hugely increase and swallow Mercury, Venus, and Earth.

10. As decreed in the Council of Vienne (1311), "we can not reach in this life the final beatitude in its whole perfection" (Denzinger [1854] 1959, § 474).

11. This includes maintaining the natural nutrients and wholesome places of our planet, its energetic and material supplies for clean technical enterprises, its possibilities of freight, person and word transportation, its mild human climate, its defenses from dangerous external radiations, and so on.

12. In this universal perspective the purpose of our activity must be clarified. It cannot consist in capitalistic enriching of personal lives. We should universally extend the Christian

doctrine, assigning capital a social function for the common well-being (so that, for instance, property fades in the case of extreme necessity).

13. The images are those of “the holy city, a new Jerusalem,” the tabernacle and “God dwelling with human race,” “God’s people and God himself always with them” (Revelation 21:1–3 NAB).

14. Teilhard’s superorganism is inspired by the “mystical body of Christ” with the variety of its charismas.

15. Such ideas as hybridization and globalization were offered on 12 December 2001 by Françoise Rivière, vice president of UNESCO, in the first presentation of the program for the “Universal Forum of Cultures,” Barcelona, 2004.

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