

# Handout #5: Kenosis & Creation

A reflection based upon *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, edited by John Polkinghorne, publisher: Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (C) 2001.

While we may be unique in creation in being made in the image and likeness of God, especially in sharing in the qualities of free will and intellect which make love possible, I also believe that all of Creation bears the imprint of the Triune God. Everything created bears the finger print, as it were, of the Trinity.

If the imprint of the Trinity is found throughout creation, can we also expect to find the pattern of Kenosis reflected throughout Creation?

The answer is yes... and no... **There is a sense in which there can be no more self-emptying in nature than there can be selfishness. Both are equally category mistakes [mixing apples with oranges, as it were], projecting human possibilities onto a nature incapable of either. ... One objection to this search for precursors of kenosis in natural history is that there is little or nothing voluntary in these animal and plant behaviors, which is also why there is nothing moral there. We can take into account how what are, from one perspective, self-fulfilling activities, are from another perspective, activities in which a self is limited with respect to others. But no action can be kenotic unless it is freely chosen. Trees do nothing voluntary, therefore nothing kenotic. ... So there is nothing to commend them for, and this is a radical difference with a voluntary self-limiting on behalf of others, as found in the life of Jesus or the lives of the saints.** (Holmes Rolston; pp. 61-62, *Work of Love*)



**Jurgen Moltmann** speaks of three ways in which Creation reveals or points to aspects of God imposing self-limits on Godself so that Creation may take place and endure. Moltmann speaks of these aspects of the kenosis of God as pertaining to self-definition, self-contraction, and self-humiliation.

**a. Is creation an act of *divine self-definition*? ...By differentiating himself as Creator from a created world, God creates a reality that is not divine but is not Nothing either, and preserves it by distancing himself from it. ... If God is in his very essence infinite, then any such limit or frontier exists only through his self-limitation. That makes it possible for a finite world to co-exist with God. This self-limitation of God's which is given with the differentiation between Creator and creation is viewed in theology as the first act of grace. For the limitation of his infinity and omnipresence is itself an act of his omnipotence. Only God can limit God.** (145)

**b. Is creation an act of *divine self-contraction*? Before God went out of himself in order to create a non-divine world, he withdrew himself into himself in order to make room for the world and to concede it a space. ... God withdrew his omnipresence in order to concede space for the presence of the creation. In this way creation comes into being in the space of God's kenosis.** (p. 146)

**c. Is creation an act of *divine self-humiliation*? ... From the creation, by way of reconciliation, right down to the redemption, God's self-humiliation and self-emptying deepen and unfold. Why? Because the creation proceeds from God's love, and this love respects the particular existence of all things, and the freedom of the human beings who have been created.**

A love that gives the beloved space, allows them time, and expects and demands of them freedom is the power of lovers who can withdraw in order to allow the beloved to grow and to come. ... If we apply this perception to the Creator's relation to those he has created, what follows is a restriction of God's omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience for the sake of conceding room to live to those he has created. (pp. 146-147)

**George F.R. Ellis**, also sees love as the reason for and the foundation of both the creation of the world and the kenosis of God.

Ellis sees kenosis not just as letting go or giving up, or restricting the self, but as **being prepared to do so in a creative and positive way for a positive purpose in tune with the nature of God**. Thus Ellis defines Kenosis as: a joyous, kind, and loving attitude that is willing to give up selfish desires and to make sacrifices on behalf of others for the common good and the glory of God, doing this in a generous and creative way, avoiding the pitfalls of pride, and guided and inspired by the love of God and the gift of grace. (p. 108)

Given the established natural order, created and sustained by God, God's action in human life is through images of love and truth, not through any form of coercion. This mode of action is a voluntary choice on the part of the Creator, made because it is the only mode of attaining the goal of eliciting a free response of love and sacrifice from individuals endowed with free will. It implies total restraint in the use of God's omnipotent power, for otherwise a free response to God's action is not possible. (p. 114)

... Are the features of pain and evil implied in every universe that allows free will, as outlined here? Almost certainly, the answer is Yes-- because of the very nature of free will; for any restrictions on the natural order that prevented that self-centered and selfish use of will which is the foundation of evil action, would simultaneously destroy the possibility of free response and loving action which is the aim of the whole. God then shares in the resulting suffering-- thus transforming it. (p. 116)

### Reflection Questions:

- In what ways might I try to coerce others to see it my way, do it my way, or decide for them? Where and when should I "hold back"?
- What might I need to let go of so as to allow others to respond in freedom, rather than fear, shame or guilt?
- How do I allow, in my actions, the *rain to fall on the good and bad alike*?



# Handout #6: Kenosis & Mission

***In the beginning was the Word: the word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being... (Jn 1:1-3)***

God spoke, and it was made. As Isaiah proclaims: "***... as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth... so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure and having achieved what it was sent to do.***" (Is 55:9-10)

God's creative Word is a missioned word... it is sent, and also returns. Its glory lies in achieving "what it was sent to do."

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, is also sent. And the motivation for the sending of Jesus is God's love for a broken, lost world which, rather than cast off and start over, God wanted to repair and bring home.

**When God enters the world and becomes engaged in how humans set about arranging their world and exercising authority or imposing order, the divine way of acting is paradoxical since in abasement it shows its own power at work with a different wisdom.** (p. 46)<sup>1</sup>

The paradox of Christ lies in the fact that the true lordship of God is made know in his abasement. In fact, it is possible to talk of a threefold aspect of *kenosis* when this is seen to designate the entire mystery of the Son's salvific mission. First, there is the presence in the finitude of human existence, in all its limitations and travail, but also in its joys, companionship and hope. The limitations of God's revelation through Christ include those of time, place, culture, religion....

The second aspect of *kenosis* is in his witness before the powers of the world, especially in his trial, passion and death. There he was reduced to humiliating forms, that of slave, of the criminal, of the body metaphorically "burned outside the camp."

The third aspect is death itself, knowing death to its fullness in order to show God's revelation of love and mercy in this death. It is in dying, not in avoiding death to show himself superior to Hades, that Jesus, the Son and the Christ of God, overcame death. This is death among others, with others, for others. It is passing through death in order to enter life and to open the way for others to make the same passage. To have some grasp of this, we need to think about what it means to say that he abandoned himself to death and that he felt abandoned by the Father. ... To abandon himself to death was to submit to severe limitations and restrictions. It was to abandon the people and his friends. It was to accept the term to his work, the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from ***Love Without Calculation- A Reflection on Divine Kenosis***, by David N. Power, OMI. The Crossroad Publishing Company, © 2005.

term to a life that he might well have imagined coming to greater fulfillment. In all of this, he felt himself abandoned by God. That for which he had been sent, he could not accomplish. (p. 47)

The extreme act of death was to abandon himself into the hands of the one by whom he felt abandoned, accepting that finally all is in God's hands and that God's power is best shown in an abased servant, who learns how to die, "learning obedience by his suffering." (pp. 47-48)

...all Christians would benefit from thinking about this kenotic model of incarnation and Church. ... A community of faith will realize that, as Christ's Body, it, too, must in self-emptying find its identity in and with those who are nothing-- with the suffering, the oppressed, the depressed, the divided, the culturally and socially torn. (p. 55)

To be genuine bearers of witness to Christ's lordship won through kenosis, and so to the divine Name revealed, we are to know from the willed weakness of Christ what it is to be a weak Church. (p. 55)

Taking the kenosis of Christ as the mystery to be shared by faith and as exemplary for his Body, the Church must be configured to his three-fold self-abasement in order to be a sign of unity and instrument of salvation, showing forth the love and mercy of God for the world. The Church is to take on the finitude of human existence in the embrace of its own weakness, but with and for suffering humanity, especially its weakest members, being itself weak and sinful. It is to empty itself of claims to power and glory before persons of the world in order to show the face of the Son and of the Father, and the true power of the Spirit. It is to enter death for others, to die to what is limited in its own being in order to embrace reality more fully.

This applies especially to structure and forms of power that have to be renounced in order to let God's power show forth. It is odd that church authority and Church faithful want to see Christ represented in a show of a power analogous to worldly power, instead of in lowliness like unto his. (p. 83)

### Reflection Questions:

- What are some of the latest "missionings" or sendings I have been engaged in?
- Where was I being sent... into what new space, environment, or situation was I asked to enter?
- Where was I coming from... and what did I have to leave behind, let go of, move away from, in order to journey to my new space, place of mission?
- How has the Lord spoken to me through this change of residence, ministry, community, or state of health?
- What word can I speak of convey to echo the compassion and care of God in my current surroundings or location?

# Talk #5-- Kenosis and Creation

**[SLIDE 2]** In the first book of the bible it states that we are made in the image and likeness of God... male and female we are made in the likeness of God.

It is also a fundamental dogma of the Christian faith that the God, in whose image we are created, is Triune. Perhaps the shortest explanation of this is given in the shortest explanation of God given in the First Letter of John: God is love. And love is a relationship between persons, hence the One God is also the Triune God. Thus we are made in the image and likeness of a community of persons indwelling in love.

**[** While we may be unique in creation in being made in the image and likeness of God, especially in sharing in the qualities of free will and intellect which make love possible, I also believe that all of Creation bears the imprint of the Triune God. **]**

**[** Everything created bears the finger print, as it were, of the Trinity. **]**

**[ SLIDE 3]** Consider: **]** **[CLICK ON EACH BULLET-POINT]**

- H<sup>2</sup>O, basic building block for life on this planet, has only three molecules...
- There are three and only three primary colors...
- In Western music the most harmonious chords are made up of three notes...
- In the field of psychology, the human person is made up of three elements: Id, Ego, Super-ego
- In classical philosophy the human is spoken of as a composite of Mind, Body and Spirit
- Time (and grammar) is traditionally divided into three moments: Past, Present, Future.
- The most basic particles yet discovered are quarks... there are six types, yet they are never (in nature) found alone, but rather in pairs or triads... and each quark has an electric charge or energy expressed in a value with a denominator of 3 (+1/3, -1/3, +2/3, -2/3, +3/3, -3/3)

- Hegel's philosophy is based on a trinitarian pattern of Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis...
- Enneagram is also trinitarian in its pattern... a circle on which are arranged nine types, in groups of three.
- The honeycomb of bees is comprised of hexagons, which are based on a structure having only 180° angles... that is, one-third of the circle.
- The genetic code consists of 64 *triplets* of nucleotides.

If the imprint of the Trinity is found throughout creation, can we also expect to find the pattern of Kenosis reflected throughout Creation?

The answer is yes... and no... and perhaps mostly no.

Let us look at the example [SLIDE 4] of a tree losing its leaves, which in turn become nourishment for the growth of a future generation of leaves.

First of all, where do you find yourself in this analogy? Where is the individual which goes through the out-pouring of self so that others may live? Is it the tree, or is it the leaf?

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI speaks of how that which we let go of rather than cling on to is precisely that which can ascend and bless us from above. He uses the image of the ***Ascension of the Lord*** to describe this dynamic of being blessed by what we have let go of. This, too, reflects the dynamic kenosis, for what Jesus let go of (his very life) was returned to him by the Father (not by his own power), yet in an even more glorious way. From the perspective of the tree, it is that which the tree lets go of which also becomes, through the power of God working through the laws of nature (including the process of decay) which God had established, which becomes a source of new life and growth for the tree.

From the perspective of the leaf, the pattern of kenosis seems even more clear, for here we can speak of a self-sacrifice so that others may live and grow... for if the leaves of this season do not let go and fall, there will be no space for future generations of leaves.

**[SLIDE 5]** However, it may be more accurate to say that instead of finding the pattern of kenosis reflected in Creation, that Creation itself reflects the kenosis of God. [There is a real sense in which we can say the action of kenosis is not found in nature (beyond the human forum), for kenosis requires the action of an agent of free will... the voluntary action of self-out-pouring or sacrifice, or at least the voluntary acquiescence to the situation we find ourselves in, even when it is beyond our control. ] As philosopher Holmes Rolston explains:

**[SLIDE 6]** There is a sense in which there can be no more self-emptying in nature than there can be selfishness. [ Both are equally category mistakes [mixing apples with oranges, as it were], projecting human possibilities onto a nature incapable of either. ... ] [ One objection to this search for precursors of kenosis in natural history is that there is little or nothing voluntary in these animal and plant behaviors, which is also why there is nothing moral there. ]

**[SLIDE 7]** [ We can take into account how what are, from one perspective, self-fulfilling activities, are from another perspective, activities in which a self is limited with respect to others. ] [ But no action can be kenotic unless it is freely chosen. Trees do nothing voluntary, therefore nothing kenotic. ... ] [ So there is nothing to commend them for, and this is a radical difference with a voluntary self-limiting on behalf of others, as found in the life of Jesus or the lives of the saints. ] [ (Holmes Rolston; pp. 61-62, *Work of Love*) ]

**[SLIDE 8]** Yet there is a sense in which Creation as a whole reflects kenosis, for *Creation itself is a sign, not of its own self- out-pouring, but of the Kenosis of the Creator.*

I would like to share with you thoughts from two writers who both speak of Creation as an act of Divine kenosis or self-limitation of God. The first writer we will consider is theologian

**[Jurgen Moltmann]:**

Moltmann speaks of [ three ways in which Creation reveals or points to aspects of God imposing self-limits] on Godself so that Creation may take place and endure.

Jurgen Moltmann speaks of these aspects of the kenosis of God as pertaining to [self-definition, ] [self-contraction, and] [self-humiliation. ]

**[ SLIDE 9 ]** a. Is creation an act of *divine self-definition*? ... Logically speaking, God's self-determination to be the Creator precedes the act of creation. God determines himself before he determines the world. It is therefore correct to see God's self-determination to be the Creator of a non-divine world as already a self-limitation on God's part: [(1) out of his infinite possibilities God realizes this particular one, and renounces all others; ] [(2) God's determination to be Creator is linked with the consideration for his creation that allow it space and time and its own movement, so that it is not crushed by the divine reality or totally absorbed by it.] By differentiating himself as Creator from a created world, God creates a reality that is not divine but is not Nothing either, and preserves it by distancing himself from it. ... If God is in his very essence infinite, then any such limit or frontier exists only through his self-limitation. That makes it possible for a finite world to co-exist with God. **[SLIDE 10]** This self-limitation of God's which is given with the differentiation between Creator and creation is viewed in theology as the first act of grace. [ For the limitation of his infinity and omnipresence is itself an act of his omnipotence. Only God can limit God.] (145)

We can also say that self-definition is an aspect of the kenosis we may go through. We take on certain roles of service for the benefit of others, and with these roles of service come boundaries which limit the kind of relationship we may have to others. A brother who serves his community through the role of provincial or leadership ministry would certainly know this. A teacher would also experience this in relationship to her/his students. When I was a formator, I took on a specific role of service to my younger brothers in the congregation (at least so far all our candidates are younger than me!)... and this meant that we were not peers, or on equal footing, or best friends. My being defined as their formator placed some boundaries on the relationship which may, in other circumstances, not apply.

Children need their parents to be parents... and not their buddy or friend or peer.



The boundaries which our role as minister or authority to others places on us is done in service to and for the good of the other.

**[SLIDE 11] b. Is creation an act of *divine self-contraction*? [ Before God went out of himself in order to create a non-divine world, he withdrew himself into himself in order to make room for the world and to concede it a space.] ... [God withdrew his omnipresence in order to concede space for the presence of the creation. In this way creation comes into being in the space of God's kenosis.]**

(p. 14) **[Picture]**

Even in our relationships with others we often must pull back, as it were, to give space to the other person to move and breathe and even leave us. Relationships which lack this "giving room to others" are often described as "smothering". If someone senses that we are coming on too strong or taking up too much room, they may tell us to "back off". These all reflect ways in which we sometimes impose self-limits on our presence in order to give room to the other in which she may grow or be nurtured.

**[SLIDE 12] c. Is creation an act of *divine self-humiliation*? ... From the creation, by way of reconciliation, right down to the redemption, God's self-humiliation and self-emptying deepen and unfold. [ Why? Because the creation proceeds from God's love, and this love respects the particular existence of all things, and the freedom of the human beings who have been created.]**

**[SLIDE 13] A love that gives the beloved space, allows them time, and expects and demands of them freedom is the power of lovers who can withdraw in order to allow the beloved to grow and to come. ... [ If we apply this perception to the Creator's relation to those he has created, what follows is a restriction of God's omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience for the sake of conceding room to live to those he has created. ]** (pp. 146-147)

This third aspect of God's divine kenosis or self-limitation is a furthering of the previous one. Not only does God draw back, as it were, and give space in which Creation can enter in, but God also, out of love for all beings and out of respect for humans, from whom a response of love is possible since we have been given

the gifts of free will and intellect, also sets limits to the exercise of divine power and knowing. These limitations are seen most clearly in the incarnation of Jesus, in whom the Divinity never shielded him or spared him from experiencing the fullness of his humanity, including its sufferings and weakness.

All of this self-limitation of God is undergone out of love for humanity and all creation.

**[SLIDE 14]** Our next writer, professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Capetown, South Africa, **George F.R. Ellis**, also sees love as the reason for and the foundation of both the creation of the world and the kenosis of God.

Ellis sees kenosis not just as letting go or giving up, or restricting the self, but as **being prepared to do so in a creative and positive way for a positive purpose in tune with the nature of God**. Thus Ellis defines Kenosis as: **[ a joyous, kind, and loving attitude that is willing to give up selfish desires and to make sacrifices on behalf of others for the common good and the glory of God, doing this in a generous and creative way, avoiding the pitfalls of pride, and guided and inspired by the love of God and the gift of grace.]** (p. 108)

As mentioned earlier, the nature of God is Love... which is why God, who in classical theology is complete and lacks nothing nor needs nothing more for fullness, is Triune... a community of persons indwelling in love. But love doesn't want to sit at home... love also desires to be expressed in the other.

But Love wants more than expression beyond itself, it wants to receive back a response, also born of love. For this to happen, the Other must also be capable of love-- a response born out of freedom, understanding and choice. Thus God has created a world in which God's omnipotence is voluntarily limited, so as to allow the human, with gifts of intellect and freedom, the space and freedom in which to make a loving response... one made in freedom and not through coercion.

As Ellis explains: **[SLIDE 15]** **Given the established natural order, created and sustained by God, God's action in human life is through images of love and truth, not through any form of coercion. [ This mode of action is a voluntary**

**choice on the part of the Creator, made because it is the only mode of attaining the goal of eliciting a free response of love and sacrifice from individuals endowed with free will.] [ It implies total restraint in the use of God's omnipotent power, for otherwise a free response to God's action is not possible.] (p. 114)**

Ellis goes on to outline **[SLIDE 16]** five conditions which make possible the creation of a world in which the creature can return to the Creator a free response in love:

### **[1. The Ordered Universe**

**First, there is a need for the creation of a universe where ordered patterns of behavior exist, for without this, free will... cannot function sensibly.] If there were no rules or reliable patterns of behavior governing the activity of natural phenomena, it would not be possible to have a meaningful moral response to the happenings around one. ...Thus we envisage the Creator at all times maintaining the nature of the physical world so that a chosen set of laws of physics govern its evolution. Once this choice has been made, then the manner of action of laws will be seen by us as absolute and as rigorously determining the behavior of matter. One can then act freely within the confines of the laws, but the laws themselves cannot be altered by any action of humanity. (pp. 114-115)**

### **[2. The Anthropic Universe: Free Will**

**We require further that these laws and regulations allow the existence of intelligent human beings, who can sense and react in a conscious way, and who have effective free will. ... there must be a meaningful freedom of choice that can be exercised in a responsible way (for without this the concept of ethics is meaningless.)] This implies accepting the conclusions resulting from Anthropic Principle discussions: fine-tuned laws of physics are required, leading to the self-creative power of matter in the expanding universe leading to the spontaneous growth of complex structures and eventually the emergence of intelligent life. (p. 115)**

It has been pointed out by the sciences that the conditions present at the beginning of creation (in the Big Bang) were such that they would favor (or at least allow for) the development of life. Had the initial conditions varied just a little in temperature or speed, the results could well have been a vast, dead universe. And yet... could not the creator have set up the universe in such a way as to bar out any and all evil. Did the Garden of Paradise have to have a snake in it, through which evil was to gain a foothold? Ellis frames this question in the following way:

**[SLIDE 17] ... Are the features of pain and evil implied in every universe that allows free will, as outlined here? Almost certainly, the answer is Yes-- because of the very nature of free will; for any restrictions on the natural order that prevented that self-centered and selfish use of will which is the foundation of evil action, would simultaneously destroy the possibility of free response and loving action which is the aim of the whole. God then shares in the resulting suffering-- thus transforming it. (p. 116)**

### **[SLIDE 18] 3. The Provident Universe**

**In the temptations [in the desert], Christ rejected the use of force to establish men's allegiance, and the offer to them of a good (material) time conditioned on obedience. The same essential nature needs to be built into the creation of the universe, for otherwise a free response would not be possible. This is achieved by the impartial operation of the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology, offering to each person alike the bounty of nature... The rain falls alike on believer and unbeliever, and makes their existence possible. (p. 116)**

Ellis sees in the temptations of Christ in the desert a free choice made on the part of Christ to reject any use of power or coercion by which to impose the Kingdom of God. Through the temptation to turn stone into bread, Jesus is tempted to use his divine powers to satisfy the creature wants of himself and his human brethren. In the temptation to cast himself off the parapet of the temple, Jesus is tempted to provide irresistible evidence of his divine mission, thus making doubt impossible. Finally, Jesus is tempted to win the kingdom of the world by establishing an earthly monarchy in league with the Tempter. In facing these

temptations, Jesus comes to the realization described by Anglican archbishop William Temple thus: **Every one of these conceptions [or temptations] contained truth. Yet if any or all of these are taken as fully representative of the Kingdom, they have one fatal defect. They all represent ways of securing the outward obedience of men apart from inner loyalty; they are ways of controlling conduct, but not ways of winning hearts and wills. He might bribe men by promise of good things; he might coerce men to obey by threat of penalty; he might offer irresistible proof; [but] all these rejected methods are essentially appeals to self-interest; and the kingdom of God, who is love, cannot be established that way. ... The new conception which takes the place of those rejected is that the Son of Man must suffer. For the manifestation of love, by which it wins its response, is sacrifice. The principle of sacrifice is that we choose to do or suffer what apart from our love we should not choose to do or suffer.** (p. 111)

The universe is ordered in such a way that our response to God is not coerced or forced, as would be the case if, for example, it rained only on the good but not the bad.

#### **[SLIDE 19] 4. The Hidden Nature**

**A further requirement must be satisfied, to enable the free response envisaged in Jesus' response to the temptations: that the created world would not be dominated by God himself... Thus the further requirement is that the nature of God and his creative activity be largely hidden, so that doubt is possible. ...Sufficient evidence is given for knowledge of God's existence and an outline of his will, but this evidence is not overbearing. The ability to see the truth is dependent on readiness to listen and openness to the message (John 3:3)** (p. 117)

#### **[ 5. The Possibility of Revelation**

**...despite the hidden nature of the underlying reality, it will still be open to those who wish to discern this nature... and to receive encouragement to follow the true way.] ... there is indeed a channel for visions of ultimate reality,**

**available to those open to them; allowing the nature of that transcendent reality to partially shine through into the immanent reality of the world, making available to us new patterns of understanding , and providing encouragement and strength to follow these visions. (p. 117)**

Through such aspects of the order and nature of creation, we can see the kenosis of God... how the Divine makes space for the non-divine to enter in and respond in freedom, not coercion.

**[SLIDE 20] Reflection Questions:**

- In what ways might I try to coerce others to see it my way, do it my way, or decide for them? Where and when should I "hold back"?
- What might I need to let go of so as to allow others to respond in freedom, rather than fear, shame or guilt?
- How do I allow, in my actions, the *rain to fall on the good and bad alike*?

**[SLIDE 21-- LJC et MI...]**

## Talk #6-- KENOSIS & MISSION

**[SLIDE 2]** *As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on the faithful. For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.* (Ps 103:13-14 NAB)

We have seen how Creation reflects the kenosis of God, how God does not overpower us with his glory, power or radiance, but steps it down, as it were, so that we are left in freedom to respond. This verse from psalm 103 also reflects how God keeps in mind our feeble nature, and responds accordingly.

Thus throughout the scriptures we see how, when the Lord reveals himself to his prophets, he does so in subdued ways which they can withstand, for no one can see the face of God (the full glory of God) and live. And so when God walks past Moses, he shelters Moses behind a rock, and allows Moses to see not his face, but his back. God speaks to us in the whisper of a breeze, rather than the overwhelming roar of thunder or earthquake. These are all examples of how God sets limits upon herself so that when God communicates with us, we are left to respond in freedom rather than from coercion.

I would now like to look at kenosis through the framework of mission and Word, or of the Sent Word of God by which all things came to be, are redeemed, and will come to be fulfilled.

As John's Gospel mentions,

**[SLIDE 3]** *In the beginning was the Word: the word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being...* (Jn 1:1-3)

God spoke, and it was made. As Isaiah proclaims: **[ "... as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth... so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure and having achieved what it was sent to do." ]** (Is 55:9-10)

God's creative Word is a missioned word... it is sent, and also returns. Its glory lies in achieving "what it was sent to do."

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, is also sent. **[SLIDE 4]** And the motivation for the sending of Jesus is God's love for a broken, lost world which, rather than cast off and start over, God wanted to repair and bring home. What a novel idea!

**[** We live in a toss away, throw away world. It is today cheaper to buy a watch than to repair one. Diapers, cameras, and bed sheets are all sold as disposable items. When toys get broken they often get tossed. Are we not all old enough to remember when fountain pens were refillable, with ink from a bottle? Today when the ink runs out, so to does the pen. **]** **[**Consider also:

- It can often costs more to renovate an old building than to build a new one.
- Many of our items come with expiration dates, after which they are to be thrown out.
- Marketing ads continually entice us to buy something NEW and IMPROVED. When was the last time you were encouraged to buy something Old and Repaired?
- And worst of all, even people have become castoffs from our society. How sad the headlines have been which tell of babies found in dumpsters.**]**

**[** We produce so much garbage that we now sell trash compactors, and continue to look for more sites to become "landfills" for the increasing mountains of our throw-away garbage.**]**

Into this tired world of brokenness and refuse, God cared enough to send his very best. As Jesus tells Nicodemus, **[ "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."** ] (Jn 3:16-17)

God's attitude to the world is certainly countercultural for us. When things get old and broken, rusty and in disrepair, we call it junk and throw it away.



**[SLIDE 5]** God, however, continues to see in us and our world something which he cherishes, something which he loves... and [ like a child who will not let go of his favorite blanket or teddy bear, no matter how dirty or worn-out it may be, God refuses to toss it away and start over. Rather, he sends his very best, his Son... with the mission not to condemn the world, but to heal it, guide it, bring it home.]

This short passage from John's gospel not only gives us an understanding for the motive of God sending his Son into the world, but it also indicates the motive for all of the Church's ministry.

If it is true that God sent his Son into the world, then it is also true that his Son has sent us, his Church and Body, into the world. **[SLIDE 6]** *"As the Father sent me, so I send you..."* says Jesus. And the motive and game plan [ for both sendings (the Incarnation and Pentecost] if we are to name them) are the same. We are sent not to condemn the world, but to express the love God has for the world, and to help that world be healed, be whole, and be at home with God.

**[SLIDE 7]** The sending of the Word of God into the flesh of humanity is the kenosis of Christ. But the paradox is that when the Lord of the Universe, the All-powerful, All Mighty One from whom all things come, entered physically into our world and our history, he did so through abasement and humility.

David Power speaks of this paradoxical kenosis of Christ as being threefold. He describes it thus:

**[When God enters the world and becomes engaged in how humans set about arranging their world and exercising authority or imposing order, the divine way of acting is paradoxical since in abasement it shows its own power at work with a different wisdom. ]** (p. 46)

**[SLIDE 8]** The paradox of Christ lies in the fact that the true lordship of God is made know in his abasement. In fact, it is possible to talk of a threefold aspect of *kenosis* when this is seen to designate the entire mystery of the Son's salvific mission. [ First, there is the presence in the finitude of human existence, in all its limitations and travail, but also in its joys, companionship and hope. The

**limitations of God's revelation through Christ include those of time, place, culture, religion....]**

When God became flesh, Christ truly took on the limitations of our nature. He was not playacting. Jesus lived as a member of the defeated Israeli people within the Roman empire on the Mediterranean coast. He belonged to a minority culture which was patriarchal in structure. He had the same limits and need as all humans. Jesus needed to study and learn in a gradual manner, as do we all. There were things he did not know. He went through the risks of establishing friendships and knowing heartbreak. He needed to maintain a relationship to God through prayer and obedience.

(Fr. Power continues:)

**[SLIDE 9] The second aspect of *kenosis* is in his witness before the powers of the world, especially in his trial, passion and death. There he was reduced to humiliating forms, that of slave, of the criminal, of the body metaphorically "burned outside the camp."** This being "burned outside the camp" is an image which calls to mind the city dump. Outside of Jerusalem, in the accursed Valley of Hinnom (where during times of Israel's apostasy human sacrifice, including the burning of children, was enacted), served as the city dump, where piles of garbage were kept continually burning. This site became known as Gehenna, the place where sinners were burned, along with the garbage. Jesus' death and burial outside the City Gates was yet another sign of how he was accursed by God and given the death sentence and burial of a criminal.

**[SLIDE 10] The third aspect is death itself, knowing death to its fullness in order to show God's revelation of love and mercy in this death. It is in dying, not in avoiding death to show himself superior to Hades, that Jesus, the Son and the Christ of God, overcame death. [ This is death among others, with others, for others. It is passing through death in order to enter life and to open the way for others to make the same passage. ] [To have some grasp of this, we need to think about what it means to say that he abandoned himself to death and that he felt abandoned by the Father. ]... [To abandon himself to death was to submit to severe limitations and restrictions. It was to abandon the people and**

his friends.] [ It was to accept the term to his work, the term to a life that he might well have imagined coming to greater fulfillment. In all of this, he felt himself abandoned by God. ] [ That for which he had been sent, he could not accomplish.] (p. 47)

**[SLIDE 11]** It is difficult, perhaps, to appreciate the utter sense of abandonment Jesus went through in his dying. Often we may think that because he is the Son of God, he always had a certitude about his actions, he always knew just what would happen next. [ And yet, on the cross his cry to the Father, "**Why have you abandoned me!**" ] was wrenched from the heart. He was not simply reading a script. Yet the sense of abandonment by the Father which Jesus went through was also the result of his deep love for others... the same love which prompted the Father to send his Son to the World so as to save the World. Fr. Power explains:

**This final abasement in death, abandoned by God, is hardest to penetrate and yet vital to faith in the mystery of the Son. The abandonment by the Father which Jesus suffered in his death was brought about by his love for sinful humanity, by his desire to save all from being overcome by death, his wish to bring God to all and all to God. One with them, even those sinners to whom he offered God's forgiveness, he saw some rejecting this love, excluded from the life that he had come to bring. This was to feel himself abandoned by the Father, abandoned in his solidarity with sinners, since God's love had not conquered them all, since the Spirit had not raised all from sin and death, had not softened the hearts of those who refused to forgive their enemies. This is indeed the pain of hell, to see persons refusing love, to see the love of God missing the mark, that love out of which he abandoned his own self to death and the abyss.** (p. 47)

**[SLIDE 12]** ... The pain of this abandonment was very concrete. [ It was to see Judas deflected from the way he had been taught.] [It was to see the scribes and Pharisees and practitioners of the Law turning from the invitation to see how fundamental and thorough was the demand to love one's neighbors as oneself, to care for the sick and the suffering and those outside the Law.]

**[SLIDE 13]** It was to see his own companions and friends at risk, denying his name or standing far off, outside the circle beneath the Cross, hesitant, doubtful, unable to accept the way of the Cross for him and for themselves.

**[ The abandonment by the Father was his vision, his heartbreak, over love failing. ]** Yet he still gave himself over to death so that all these might live. Paradoxically, it was by carrying the abandonment of sinners and dying, of their failure to enter the circle of the Mount or the circle of the Cross, and so seeing them and himself with them outside God's love, that Jesus in the obedience of his suffering overcame sin and the hold of death on humanity. ...

**[SLIDE 14]** The extreme act of death was to abandon himself into the hands of the one by whom he felt abandoned, accepting that finally all is in God's hands and that God's power is best shown in an abased servant, who learns how to die, "learning obedience by his suffering." (pp. 47-48)

This is the emptying of Christ, who withheld nothing back for himself, but poured himself out fully in service to his God and his neighbor. And because of this, God highly exalted him and gave him the Name above every other name. It is the Name in which we are also sent. We are sent in the name of the Crucified, Risen Lord... who still bears the marks of crucifixion. We are not sent with signs of power and dominance, but with the sign of the Cross. We are called to follow in the kenosis of Christ, so that as we are poured out and emptied, Christ may fill us up and live through us.

We are missioned and sent in the Name of the Word Made Flesh, the Word Sent Among Us, who emptied himself into our frailty, weakness and human nature. We, as Church and Body of Christ, continue to be sent into the world as expressions of the Father's self-sacrificing love and compassion for a hurting world. We are sent to go, not from strength to strength, but from weakness to weakness, for in this is God's power revealed. And therefore, as the Church is missioned and sent into the world, she finds herself especially called to be aligned and in communion with the poor and those on the outside of the halls of power.

As David Power would tell us:

**[SLIDE 15]** ...all Christians would benefit from thinking about this kenotic model of incarnation and Church. ... A community of faith will realize that, as Christ's Body, it, too, must in self-emptying find its identity in and with those who are nothing-- with the suffering, the oppressed, the depressed, the divided, the culturally and socially torn. (p. 55)

**[SLIDE 16]** To be genuine bearers of witness to Christ's lordship won through kenosis, and so to the divine Name revealed, we are to know from the willed weakness of Christ what it is to be a weak Church. (p. 55)

**[SLIDE 17]** And just as the kenosis of Christ can be described having three aspects, so too can the kenosis of the church, Christ's Body, be seen as corresponding to the kenosis of her Lord:

**[ Taking the kenosis of Christ as the mystery to be shared by faith and as exemplary for his Body, the Church must be configured to his three-fold self-abasement in order to be a sign of unity and instrument of salvation, showing forth the love and mercy of God for the world. ] [The Church is to take on the finitude of human existence in the embrace of its own weakness, but with and for suffering humanity, especially its weakest members, being itself weak and sinful. ] [SLIDE 18] It is to empty itself of claims to power and glory before persons of the world in order to show the face of the Son and of the Father, and the true power of the Spirit. ] [ It is to enter death for others, to die to what is limited in its own being in order to embrace reality more fully.]**

**[SLIDE 19]** This applies especially to structure and forms of power that have to be renounced in order to let God's power show forth. It is odd that church authority and Church faithful want to see Christ represented in a show of a power analogous to worldly power, instead of in lowliness like unto his. (p. 83)

Let me conclude with a remark about being sent or being missioned. Our lives are filled with sendings. We are not allowed to simply sit at home and stay there for the rest of our lives. **[SLIDE 20]** We are sent out on our first day of school, we are **[sent out to play when the house becomes too small for Mom and all of us kids]...** we are sent out **[to the corner grocery]** in order to return with some bread and

milk... we are sent off to [seminary], or [college], so to begin life away from parental control and comfort... we are sent off to our [ first obedience (and come to maturity through what we suffer! )]... we are sent [ to a new ministry, a new community], a [ new responsibility.] We are sent off to the [ hospital, or nursing care unit], perhaps not knowing if we will return to our same room and bed which we have had these past several years. And finally, perhaps after a lengthy stay in the infirmary, or just a brief illness over the weekend, we are [sent home to God].

In all these sendings, there is a [SLIDE 21] letting go, a giving up... a being poured out. We let go of the security of home and the familiarity of kitchen, and enter into our first grade classroom where they don't understand us like they do at home, and where the lunches aren't made with Mom's touch. [We let go of our familiar surroundings, and enter a world where everything seems new... and out of place. We give up our room at home, and move out into a new house. We leave behind the intimate community of family and enter a larger one where even though I am speaking English they don't seem to understand me... and sometimes what they say sounds so unintelligible!] We [leave behind some of our favorite recipes and come to a table where the tastes and smells are foreign to home. We leave behind our comfort zone of working where we have prospered for several years, and now have to learn some new management skills. We leave behind some cherished independence as we give up the car keys and rely on others to get us where we need or want to be.] [We give up a long history of low-maintenance, often taken for granted, health status, and enter stages of furthering diminishment in health and abilities].

It seems God continues to put us in positions of leaving that place or space where we felt at home, and going out into new situations and surroundings, which often stretch us to be open to possibilities of new growth that can come only at the cost of some personal dying. In being sent, we too are called [SLIDE 22] not to grasp at what we thought we had or had to be, [ but to let go] , to be [emptied out (it will feel like dying)]so that [God may continue to do for us what she did for her only begotten Son, raise him up and exalt him. ]

Our path in following Christ, in whose name we are sent, will entail joining with him in the path and process of kenosis... love being outpoured for the sake of the Other... for the sake of the world which God still cherishes and to which God has sent the only Begotten Son. Today, the sending of God's Son now includes us, as members of Christ's Body. As disciples of the Crucified and Risen Lord we are called upon not to condemn the world, not to despair of it, not to leave it behind and start over somewhere else...

**[SLIDE 23]** We are called, rather, to cherish it, to reflect God's love and care towards it. To join in the mission of Jesus, which was to redeem and bring home a world gone astray.

A large task, no doubt. It encompasses the earth. [ But let us begin at home, and in our neighborhood. ] [Perhaps today is the time to send a card to a friend or neighbor whom you have been meaning to compliment,] to say hi to him, or to ask her [over for a cup of tea.] And as you [ send your card give a prayer of thanks to God for sending the Son... and ask that you to may be a part of that sending this day. ]

**[As the Father sent me, so am I sending you. --John 20:21]**

**[SLIDE 24]** Reflection Questions: **[Click on each question...]**

- What are some of the latest "missionings" or sendings I have been engaged in?
- Where was I being sent... into what new space, environment, or situation was I asked to enter?
- Where was I coming from... and what did I have to leave behind, let go of, move away from, in order to journey to my new space, place of mission?
- How has the Lord spoken to me through this change of residence, ministry, community, or state of health?
- What word can I speak so as to convey or echo the compassion and care of God in my current surroundings or location?

**[SLIDE 25]** LJC & MI