

## STUDII ȘI ARTICOLE

### ARTICLES

#### **‘All things came into being through him:’ Creation and Incarnation**

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**Summary:** The problem of timelessness and the incarnation is not new and is well explored. However, the related question of a single divine act and the incarnation is largely ignored. How does God create and become incarnate? This follows from divine simplicity and atemporality. There is one divine act and many different extrinsic relations to that one act. However, the difference between creation and incarnation does seem to be intrinsic for God. Many theologians seem to accept that God is doing something different in the incarnation to what God does in creation. Drawing on elements of Thomism, and particularly Duns Scotus’ distinction between essentially-ordered and accidentally-ordered series, this paper will argue that if creation is understood as an ontological relation, rather than a specific act of God, then one can re-interpret the incarnation to be that which mediates ontological relation. It will then suggest that this leads to a reinterpretation of kenosis, which sees it as a synonym for participation, rather than a literal divestment. This makes kenosis an essentially-ordered relation between God and creatures that explains how creatures participate in God.

**Key Words:** Incarnation, Creation, Jesus Christ, Kenosis, Participation

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## Introduction

The problem of reconciling a timeless,<sup>2</sup> unchanging God and the incarnation is not a novel problem. Quite apart from (but certainly related to) the logical problem of reconciling two natures in Christ, there is also ‘a *prima facie* difficulty in reconciling this view of eternity with the christian belief in the Incarnation, the hypostatic union of timeless God and time-bound man in one Christ.’<sup>3</sup> That is, it is not just a question of how Christ can be both temporal and atemporal simultaneously, but how Christ can *become* temporal at a specific time if God is atemporal, or whether the incarnation can be ‘said to be the divine response to a previous state of affairs, namely the Fall.’<sup>4</sup> Thomas Senor sees this as insurmountable, and rejects divine timelessness as a consequence,<sup>5</sup> as do others.<sup>6</sup> However, some such as Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann defend atemporality and the incarnation,<sup>7</sup> as do others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> By ‘timeless’ and ‘atemporal,’ this paper takes as axiomatic to mean the analogy of the centre of circle to its circumference or what Katherin Rogers calls ‘fifth dimensionalism’ (Katherin Rogers ‘Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension’, *The Saint Anselm Journal Vol. 3 No. 2* (2006), 7). Other ideas of atemporality, such as sempiternality or omnitemporality will be assumed to be incorrect.

<sup>3</sup> J.L. Tomkinson ‘Divine Sempiternity and Atemporality’, in *Religious Studies Vol. 18 No. 2* (1982), 186

<sup>4</sup> Tomkinson ‘Divine Sempiternity and Atemporality’, 186; however, I take it as axiomatic that John Duns Scotus’ solution - that the incarnation is primarily concerned with creation and only secondarily concerned with a Fall (which evolution suggests almost certainly was not an historical event) is an adequate solution (see *Ordinatio* 3, d. 7 q. 3; see also Bogdan Bucur ‘Foreordained from All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation According to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers’, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers Vol. 62* (2008)). In this way, what is offered in this paper can be seen as an attempt to make sense of Scotus’ claim that the incarnation is ontologically prior to creation.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Senor ‘Incarnation and Timelessness’, in *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers Vol. 7 No. 2* (1990)

<sup>6</sup> Emily Paul ‘Incarnation, Divine Timelessness, and Modality’, in *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology Vol. 3 No.1* (2019); Nicholas Wolterstorff ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality’, in Gregory Ganssle *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove IL.: IVP Academic, 2001); Richard Holland *God, Time, and the Incarnation* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012)

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Stump & Norman Kretzmann ‘Eternity’, *The Journal of Philosophy Vol. 78 No. 8* (1981)

<sup>8</sup> See Paul Helm ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’, in Gregory Ganssle *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove IL.: IVP Academic, 2001); Douglas Blount ‘On the Incarnation of a Timeless God’, in Gregory Ganssle & David Woodruff *God and Time: Essays on the Divine*

However, an element of this question that receives little attention by contemporary scholars is whether or not the incarnation contravenes the related claim that there is only a single divine act. Thomas Aquinas writes that 'God's activity can be considered either on the part of the doer or of the done. If on the part of the doer, there is only one activity in God ... but considered on the side of what is done, there are indeed different activities.'<sup>9</sup> The immediate context of this quotation is divine simplicity, but there are obvious temporal dimensions. Paul Haffner and David Lane both argue that between creation and conservation 'there is no essential difference, because God is performing one act outside of time which "maintains the whole temporal sequence from its first moment onwards,"'<sup>10</sup> and that '[c]reation and conservation of the universe is one timeless act.'<sup>11</sup> More explicitly, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin writes that '[t]here is always only *one* creative action (identical with conservation) which continually raises creatures towards a fuller-being by means of their secondary activity and their earlier advances,'<sup>12</sup> so that creation, fall, incarnation and redemption 'are, in some way, aspects (distinct in reality but physically linked) of one and the same divine operation.'<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, too, 'does not seem to distinguish clearly between the gracious generosity of God in creating and what the Scholastics will call habitual or sanctifying grace.'<sup>14</sup>

In this way, assuming that the classic doctrine of simplicity holds along with atemporality, then 'since the divine essence is simple, it is simple also in its actions...The divine creativity is...one in its source, many in its relations to things.'<sup>15</sup> so that while there are 'various temporal effects' of God's act, there is still only one

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*Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 236-48; Alexander Garton "'Very Truly I tell you, Before Abraham was, I am": A Theological Treatise on the Concept of Time in John's Gospel', in *Modern Theology Vol. 35 No.4* (2019); Brian Leftow 'A Timeless God Incarnate', in Stephen T. Davies, Daniel Kendall, & Gerald O'Collins (eds.) *The Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas *Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998), *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* 7 (294-5)

<sup>10</sup> Paul Haffner *Mystery of Creation* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995), 91

<sup>11</sup> David Lane *The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet For A New Age* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 45

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Human Energy* (London: Collins, 1969), 23

<sup>13</sup> Teilhard de Chardin *Human Energy*, 53

<sup>14</sup> William Riordan *Divine Light* (San Francisco CA.: Ignatius Press, 2008), 154; see also Robert Scuka 'Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of Meaning', in *Modern Theology Vol. 6 No. 1* (1989)

<sup>15</sup> Junius Johnson 'The One and the Many in Bonaventure Exemplarity Explained', in *Religions Vol. 7 No. 144* (2016), 12

‘single eternal act identical with God, God's action in the strict sense.’ That is, ‘[divine] actions in the world are at least *prima facie* explicable as extrinsic accidental characteristics of the unique divine action.’<sup>16</sup> Creation, conservation, and deification are not objectively different acts of God, but are merely ‘extrinsic accidental characters’ of the one act. Just as it is the person’s turning around that changes the location of the pillar, so it is the individual’s relationship (response) to the one divine act that changes, not the act itself.<sup>17</sup> That one act is neither creation, conservation, nor deification, but to the creature that act is all of those things depending on their relationship to it.

Yet, if the incarnation happens ‘by God in the very same non-temporal act by which God also creates and consummates the created order,’<sup>18</sup> how is this to be conceived? One could pose a solution like that of Maurice Wiles, in which there is not *genuinely* one act, but a ‘unity of intention’ that brings together different ‘sub-acts’ into one ‘master-act.’<sup>19</sup> Yet, this would imply that God is temporal (experiences succession) and (God’s action at least) not simple. Denis Edwards offers a comparable interpretation. Even though Edwards writes that ‘creation, incarnation, and final fulfilment are united in one act of divine self-giving,’<sup>20</sup> he qualifies that ‘there is a real distinction, for example, between God’s act in creation and God’s action in Jesus of Nazareth’<sup>21</sup> so that ‘God’s action with regard to creation is both one and diverse. It is one act of self-giving love. But this one act issues forth in creation in a range of particular acts.’<sup>22</sup> However, this means that God’s action is not *literally* singular and so either God is not genuinely atemporal or not genuinely simple.

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<sup>16</sup> Eleonor Stump and Norman Kretzmann ‘Absolute Simplicity’, in *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers Vol. 2 No. 4* (1985), 356, 366; see also Philip McCosker ‘Grace’, in Philip McCosker & Denys Turner (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to The Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 208-16

<sup>17</sup> See *ST* 1, 13, 7

<sup>18</sup> Keith Ward ‘Cosmos and Kenosis’, in John Polkinghorne (ed.) *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Cambridge MA.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 152

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Wiles *God’s Action in the World* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 96; see also Gordon Kaufmann ‘On the Meaning of “Act of God”’, in Owen Thomas (ed.) *God’s Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 143ff.

<sup>20</sup> Denis Edwards *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 40

<sup>21</sup> Edwards *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*, 39

<sup>22</sup> Edwards *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*, 57

While it is (somewhat) easy to understand how creation and deification can be different extrinsic relations to the one act,<sup>23</sup> creation and incarnation do seem to be different acts *for God*; i.e. God's creating and God's incarnation seem to be *intrinsically* distinct.<sup>24</sup> As Edward Oakes writes, 'God's power to create and sustain the universe in being is not the same as his power to become incarnate.'<sup>25</sup> Karl Rahner, too, explicitly argues that 'we can understand creation and Incarnation as two moments and two phases of the *one* process of God's self-giving and self-expression,' but then qualifies that claim with the comment that 'although it is an *intrinsically differentiated* process,'<sup>26</sup> that is, they are differentiated *for God*. The question then is: if God's act is both 'typally' one (i.e. God only does one 'thing'), on the one hand, and 'numerically' one (i.e. God only acts one 'time') on the other, if atemporality and simplicity are upheld, can a single divine act be maintained coherently along with creation *and* incarnation?

The task of this paper is not to convince the reader that atemporality, simplicity and a (literal) single divine act *should* be accepted, only *that* such an interpretation can be consonant with the incarnation. Taking as axiomatic that a timeless God and the incarnation can be held together coherently, this paper is concerned with the coherence of holding together a single divine act and the incarnation and will pose a novel solution.

### **1. Creation and Relationship**

Traditional Christian theology has maintained that creation and incarnation are separate events. Bonaventure writes that 'just as God had created all things through the Word Not Made [sic], even so he restored all things through the Word Made Flesh [sic].'<sup>27</sup> The Christian tradition has always kept these events separate; creation *and* incarnation; *two* distinct acts. So that '[t]wice that word had spoken; once in creation...and a second time at the incarnation.'<sup>28</sup> At most, Christ in the incarnation

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, there are those who reject this distinction between intrinsic singularity and extrinsic multiplicity, see William Lane Craig 'Timelessness, Creation, and God's Real Relation to the World', in *Laval théologique et philosophique Vol. 56 No. 1* (2000) cf. Matthew McWhorter 'Aquinas on God's Relation to the World', in *New Blackfriars Vol. 94 No. 1049* (2013).

<sup>24</sup> See Holland *God, Time, and the Incarnation*, 8

<sup>25</sup> Edward Oakes *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 38

<sup>26</sup> Karl Rahner *The Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York NY: Crossroad, 1978), 97 (*italics added*)

<sup>27</sup> Bonaventure *Breviloquium* (Paterson NJ.: At. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), IV, 1, 2

<sup>28</sup> J.W.C. Wand *The Four Great Heresies* (London: A R Mowbray & Co., 1955), 27

‘brings to completion what had been partial and imperfect.’<sup>29</sup> Although Chul Won Suh cautions that ‘the personal identity of the author in the divine drama does not induce us to regard the two works as the same or the continuation of one another;’ just because ‘the same author works,’ does not mean that ‘one [i]s the continuation of the other.’<sup>30</sup>

However, it is not entirely clear that the ‘first speaking’ - *creatio originalis* - is an isolated, specific, particular *event*; to say that the universe was created does not mean that God *did* something in the past. Andrew Davison writes that *creatio ex nihilo* is not ‘some putative first moment in the past’ but is ‘primarily about derivation of all things from God.’<sup>31</sup> Philip Clayton writes that ‘the creation doctrine arose as a present-tense doctrine, one less about an initial act of God than about the ongoing dependence of [creatures]...in their creator.’<sup>32</sup> This is nothing more than the logical conclusion of Thomas Aquinas’ claim that the universe can be created *and* eternal (i.e. infinite temporal duration) without contradiction.<sup>33</sup> If it is quite coherent for the universe not to have a beginning, then creation is not about beginnings.<sup>34</sup> Thus, ‘the tendency to see a connection between “the beginning of time” in the Big Bang and “the beginning of time” in the doctrine of creation...is very questionable.’<sup>35</sup> Scripture might reveal that there is a beginning, but this is not what *creatio* is about; to be created is to derive being from, and so be ontologically dependent upon, God. *Creatio* is any and every moment in which the creature derives their being from, and so ontologically utterly depends upon, God.

Importantly, the rejection of *creatio originalis* (or, more accurately, the rejection of *creatio originalis* as an ‘event’ that can be seen as coincident with any temporal moment, especially as one limited to the past) is *not* to be taken as support for *creatio continua*, in which the offending element is ‘in the past,’ so that God can be thought of

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Wilken *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 67

<sup>30</sup> Chul Won Suh *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 269

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Davison *Participation in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26

<sup>32</sup> Philip Clayton *God and Contemporary Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 26

<sup>33</sup> *ST* 1, 46, 2-3; see Thomas Aquinas *De Aeternitate Mundi*, in Thomas Gilby (trans.) *Philosophical Texts* (Durham NC.: The Labyrinth Press, 1982), 142-7

<sup>34</sup> See Étienne Gilson *Medieval Essays* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 169ff.; and Gavin Kerr ‘A Thomistic metaphysics of creation’, in *Religious Studies Vol. 48* (2012), 346

<sup>35</sup> William Stoeger ‘Contemporary Cosmology and Its Implications for the Science-Religion Dialogue’, in Robert J. Russell, William Stoeger, & George V. Coyne (eds.) *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1988), 240

as continuing an unfinished act of creation.<sup>36</sup> Rather, it rejects that *creatio* is concerned with *any* moments; it is a rejection of the idea that *creatio* consists in the physical construction of the universe. To assume that the question of whether or when creation is completed is a valid theological concern is to entirely miss the point of Aquinas' claim that the universe could very well have infinite duration; *creatio* is about ontological dependence, not physical construction or an event that is started and finished at certain times.<sup>37</sup> Instead, *creatio* is (according to Avicenna, whose 'definition of creation' was taken over by Thomas Aquinas),<sup>38</sup> 'an ontological relationship - a relationship in the order of being - with no reference to temporality.'<sup>39</sup> Creation is not something that can be finished or re-done in the future; it is a relationship. As Paul Tillich writes, '[t]he formula *creatio ex nihilo* is not the title of a story...[but] is the classical formula which expresses the *relation* between God and the world,'<sup>40</sup> or, as John Bishop and Ken Perszyk put it, 'God's creative action *just is* creation's dependence on God for its existence.'<sup>41</sup>

## **2. Essentially-ordered and Accidentally-ordered Series**

To say that creation is a relationship - participation - and not an event (even an event that continuously unfolds throughout history) can be restated using the language of cause *per se* and cause *per accidens*. Creation is not something that God does, but is a relationship of dependence that creatures have with God.

For Scotus (who, again, was influenced by Avicenna), this distinction has three elements: (a) essentially-ordered causes are depended upon by their effects; (b)

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<sup>36</sup> c.f. John Haught *Making Sense of Evolution* (Louisville KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 105; Not to mention that *creatio continua* assumes that God is temporal (i.e. acts successively), is passible (i.e. is affected by and responds to the universe), and faces significant questions of where to locate the 'causal joint' (see Sarah Lane Ritchie 'Dancing around the Causal Joint: Challenging the Theological Turn in Divine Action Theories', in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* Vol. 52 No. 2 (2017) and Richard Grigg 'Religion, Science, and Evolution: Paul Tillich's Fourth Way', in *Zygon: Journal of Science and Religion* Vol. 38 No. 4 (2003)).

<sup>37</sup> See Gilson *Medieval Essays*, 150-69 for distinction of efficient cause of motion and efficient cause of being.

<sup>38</sup> Gilson *Medieval Essays*, 176

<sup>39</sup> Steven Baldner & William Carroll (trans.) *Aquinas on Creation* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), 16; see also Baldner & Carroll *Aquinas on Creation*, 4; see *ST* 1, 45, 3

<sup>40</sup> Paul Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol.1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 254 (*italics added*)

<sup>41</sup> John Bishop & Ken Perszyk 'The Divine Attributes and Non-personal Conceptions of God', in *Topoi* Vol.36 (2017), 614

essentially-ordered causes are ontologically prior and superior to their effects; and (c) essentially-ordered causes are temporally simultaneous with their effects.<sup>42</sup> If accidentally-ordered causes are concerned with physical causes such as ‘transitions of energy, [or] movements of mass’ (which includes physical origins, i.e. the Big Bang),<sup>43</sup> then essentially-ordered causes are ‘ontological causes’ and are concerned with the ‘donation of being.’<sup>44</sup> If an accidentally-ordered series is a series of temporal events, then an essentially-ordered series is a series of ontological relationships. To use the classic examples, God is not like a mother who gives being to a daughter who is *then independent* and can exist after the mother has died (or when the mother has stopped being a cause), rather God is like the oxygen on which the candle entirely depends and without which the flame could not exist. Thomas Aquinas used precisely this distinction to support his doctrine that *creatio* is ontological relationship, rather than a beginning.<sup>45</sup>

Causes *per accidens* are necessarily temporal; they are necessarily successive and necessarily have beginnings and endings (times before and after when they are not causative, although an accidentally-ordered series can be infinitely extended). On the other hand, causes *per se* do not necessarily have any temporal characteristics. While it is possible (assuming that there are genuine causes *per se* in nature) that some causes *per se* are temporal,<sup>46</sup> it is impossible for a cause *per accidens* to be atemporal. An atemporal cause cannot be a cause *per accidens* (which would temporally locate it - i.e. it *must* be before or after something else) and so *must* be a cause *per se*, that is, simultaneous with its ‘effect.’ It is not so much that all causes *per se* must be atemporal,

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<sup>42</sup> John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, in Allan Wolter (trans.), *Philosophical Writings* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), I, d2, q1; see also John Duns Scotus (trans. Evan Roche), *De Primo Principio* (St. Bonaventure NY.: The Franciscan Institute, 1949), c.3, 2

<sup>43</sup> David Bentley Hart *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 103-4

<sup>44</sup> Hart *The Experience of God*, 55, 103-4

<sup>45</sup> *ST* 1, 46, 2; see *ST* 1, 45-6; see also Hart *The Experience of God*, pp.21-2

<sup>46</sup> Timothy O’Connor (‘Scotus on the Existence of a First Efficient Cause’, in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion Vol. 33 No. 1* (1993)) doubts whether there are any *genuine* causes *per se* in nature. Richard Swinburne (‘Causation, Time, and God’s Omniscience’, in *Topoi Vol. 36* (2017)) and William Lane Craig (‘Creation and Conservation Once More’, in *Religious Studies Vol. 34 No. 2* (1998)) reject completely the idea of ‘simultaneous cause and effect’ as conceptually/philosophically incoherent and so, by extrapolation (causes *per se* are temporally simultaneous with their effects), also doubt the possibility of causes *per se*. Swinburne and Craig’s reservations notwithstanding, the point here is that there is a sharp distinction between the two types of cause; if God is atemporal, then creation, as a divine act, must be a cause *per se*, or, in more popular language, participation.

but all atemporal 'causes' must be *per se*.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, an eternal 'being,' one whose act does not have a beginning or end and is neither before nor after any other act/event, cannot act as a cause *per accidens* and can *only* be a cause *per se*.

Importantly, *creatio continua* treats *creatio* as a cause *per accidens* and simply extends *creatio* from being the first in an accidentally-ordered series to being many instances within that series; it begins at a specific time (so occurs before other things), has temporal extension and succession, and ends at a specific time (so occurs after other things). For Thomas and Scotus, *creatio* is an essentially-ordered event; it neither begins, nor ends, is neither before nor after anything and so has no temporal extension or succession. It is not a 'putative past event' *after* which creatures have being; it is everywhere and everywhen operative, so that without God's act we 'would return to the nothingness from which we came.'<sup>48</sup> In other words, the *ex nihilo* is not a temporal designation but an ontological one; it is *ex nihilo* not *post nihilum*.<sup>49</sup> *Creatio* is a cause *per se*, not a cause *per accidens*. Or, as already argued, *creatio* is an ontological ordering/hierarchy/relation unrelated to time.

Importantly, as implied above, to say that *creatio* is everywhere and everywhen operation does not mean that God must be temporal, so that God must have a duration at least as long as the universe; rather, God is 'temporally' simultaneous to the universe as the centre of a circle is to its edge. As Wolfgang Smith writes, "the instantaneous and imperceptible moment of creation", to use St. Basil's phrase, is "equidistant"... to all times, even as the center of a circle is equidistant to all points on the circumference."<sup>50</sup> God is not temporally simultaneous/present at all times, but all times are temporally simultaneous/present to God. The *creatio originalis* is not something that God *does*; it is the divine side of a relationship in which the creature depends entirely on God for its being.

### **3. Christ the Creator**

Further, for New Testament authors, Christ is the agent of creation. The opening chapters of John's Gospel (which the title of this paper quotes) are clearly evidence of

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<sup>47</sup> In this way, while the oxygen has to have the same temporal duration as the flame in order for them to be simultaneous, the centre of a circle does not have to have the same length as the circumference (indeed, it arguably has no length) in order for all points of the circumference to be simultaneous with it.

<sup>48</sup> Basil Hume *Searching For God* (York: Ampleforth Abbey Press, 2002), 189-90

<sup>49</sup> Gerard Verschuuren *Aquinas and Modern Science* (Kettering OH: Angelico Press, 2016), 102-3

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Smith *Teilhardism and the New Religion* (Rockford IL.: Tan Books and Publishers inc., 1988), 72; see also Katherin Rogers 'Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension', in *The Saint Anselm Journal Vol. 3 No. 2* (2006), 7

this. The connection with the opening chapters of Genesis and the explicit identification of the Word that becomes flesh with the Word that creates leaves little need for further analysis.<sup>51</sup> The opening chapter of Paul's epistle to the Colossians is likewise evidence: 'in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.'<sup>52</sup> Other Pauline passages, such as 'Christ [is] the power of God,'<sup>53</sup> also imply such a doctrine. Patristic theology builds on this, such as Irenaeus' claim that Christ is the 'hand' of God,<sup>54</sup> not to mention the work of Athanasius that argued for Christ's divinity. J.W.C. Wand supports this, writing that '[t]he Apologists taught that creation is the work of the good God, the supreme being. Not that He [sic] performed it directly, by Himself, but through an intermediary, His word.'<sup>55</sup>

In this way, it is entirely appropriate to suggest that *all* divine activity (creation, conservation, deification etc) happens *through* Christ: 'the word by which God drew being from non-being, drew a physical world out of nothing that preceded it, is the same very word by which all of reality is presently sustained and will be consummated.'<sup>56</sup> More accurately, there is *only* one divine act; creation, 'present sustaining,' and consummation are 'extrinsic accidental characteristics' of the *one* speaking of the Word. 'God's word...is God's act,'<sup>57</sup> God does not act *without* Christ.<sup>58</sup> As David Bentley Hart writes, 'God is never without his [sic] Logos, the divine Wisdom, in and through whom the world is created, ordered, and sustained.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971), 139

<sup>52</sup> Col 1.16; see also Heb 1.1-3 & 1 Cor. 8.6.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Cor. 1.24

<sup>54</sup> Irenaeus 'Against Heresies', in Lindsey Hall, Murray Rae, and Stephen Holmes *Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM Press, 2010), V: 6

<sup>55</sup> Wand *The Four Great Heresies*, 27

<sup>56</sup> Ted Peters & Martinez Hewlett *Evolution From Creation to New Creation* (Nashville TN.: Abingdon Press, 2003), 164

<sup>57</sup> Wiles *God's Action in the World*, 57

<sup>58</sup> As Patristic theology affirmed, particularly through the support for dyotheletism, specifying that a particular person acts does not mean that the other persons are uninvolved. As Augustine writes that 'just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably' (Augustine *The Trinity* (Hyde Park NY.: New City Press, 1991), 70-1), so that 'the three produced that human being of the Virgin Mary and yet it is the person of the Son alone – the invisible three producing what is the visible person of the Son alone' (Augustine *The Trinity*, 114). To claim that it is only Christ who acts, does not mean that the Father and the Spirit are excluded.

<sup>59</sup> Hart *The Experience of God*, 235

#### **4. Christ the Mediator**

This assertion can be strengthened with the further Biblical claim that Christ is the 'one mediator between God and creatures.'<sup>60</sup> This being the case, it is reasonable to claim that if 'no one comes to the Father except through [Christ]'<sup>61</sup> and Christ is 'the actual mediator between God and man *and* [between] man and God *in all things*,<sup>62</sup> so that 'the gap between heaven and earth is *only* bridged definitively in the figure of Christ,<sup>63</sup> then it must also be affirmed that 'the Father comes to no one except through Christ.' Christ is not just the sole mediator between creatures and God, but between God and creatures as well.<sup>64</sup> It is not that creatures need Christ to 'ascend' to God, but also God needs Christ to 'descend' to creatures, or, as will be expounded further below, creatures need Christ to 'relate' to God, so God needs Christ to 'relate' to creatures. If God is never without the Logos, then 'all' that God 'does' is through Christ.

Others support the idea of Christ as mediator in other contexts. Frances Young notes that for Hellenist philosophy 'it was hard to relate God, or the One, with the multiplicity of things, the world of which he [sic] was supposed to be the source and ground of being,' which meant that because of God's 'utter transcendence' God was 'substantially irrelevant' to the world.<sup>65</sup> Young points to Christ as the solution. She writes that 'Logos theology and Trinitarian doctrine made it possible for God to be involved,' so that 'the Logos and the Spirit made it possible to believe in a God who is both transcendent and immanent, however paradoxical that might seem to be.'<sup>66</sup>

Crucially, Christ is the mediator between utterly transcendent God and creatures *because* he is both fully God and fully created (Christ is not a demiurge). This seems to suggest something few explicitly recognise; Christ can *only* be a mediator *as* incarnate. Emil Brunner,<sup>67</sup> Thomas Torrance,<sup>68</sup> and Sergei Bulgakov<sup>69</sup> both appear to link Christ's

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<sup>60</sup> 1 Tim 2.5

<sup>61</sup> Jn 14.6

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Torrance *Space, Time, and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 52 (*italics added*)

<sup>63</sup> Rupert Shortt *God Is No Thing* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 77 (*italics added*)

<sup>64</sup> See Garton "'Very Truly I tell you, Before Abraham was, I am": A Theological Treatise on the Concept of Time in John's Gospel', 627

<sup>65</sup> Frances Young 'A Cloud of Witnesses', in John Hick (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 24

<sup>66</sup> Young 'A Cloud of Witnesses', 41-2; see also Torrance *Space, Time, and Incarnation*, 13, 15

<sup>67</sup> Emil Brunner *The Mediator* (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1934), 309

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Torrance *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1992), 63-5

<sup>69</sup> Sergei Bulgakov *The Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids MI.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 220-1

role as mediator with his incarnation. Thomas Aquinas does so explicitly.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, it is this ‘traditional devotion to Jesus as mediator between the purely divine and the purely human’ that necessitates ‘the humanity of the exalted Christ.’<sup>71</sup>

Thus, this does not mean that Christ was only mediator for the 30 odd years in which he was alive, nor that Christ began to be mediator at the birth of Jesus. Stump and Kretzmann argue that ‘the second person eternally has two natures; and at some temporal instants...the human nature of the second person has been temporally actual,’<sup>72</sup> so that ‘[i]f God is eternal, then God’s having an assumed human nature is not something characteristic of God at some times but not at others...God is never in the state of not having an assumed human nature.’<sup>73</sup> The incarnation is an eternal event; there is a time before *Jesus* was born, but there is not a ‘time’ when *Christ* is not incarnate.<sup>74</sup> Stephen Theron acknowledges likewise that ‘God is not now living in a time after the Incarnation, whereas once he [sic] lived in a time before it. One says the same, after all, about the act of creation, viz. that it entails no change in God.’<sup>75</sup> The incarnation was not *foreordained* from all eternity; it *is* eternal. The relationship between the Son and Jesus, the hypostatic union, is no more temporal than it is spatial.<sup>76</sup> The hypostatic union is not an event in the life of the Logos, it is an ontological ordering or relation. Thus, as Paul Helm writes, ‘[t]here is therefore no sense in talking of the eternal Son of God apart from the incarnation.’<sup>77</sup>

This leads to a rethinking of the ‘pre-existence’ of Christ. The Son does not temporally precede Jesus, but is ontologically more primary than him.<sup>78</sup> Timothy Pawl agrees that ‘[o]ne should be hesitant to interpret this “pre-existence” as a temporal pre-

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<sup>70</sup> ST 3, 26, 2

<sup>71</sup> Peter Forrest ‘The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis’ in *Religious Studies* Vol. 36 No. 2 (2000), 134

<sup>72</sup> Stump & Kretzmann ‘Eternity’, 453

<sup>73</sup> Eleonore Stump *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 100

<sup>74</sup> See Paul Helm ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’, in Gregory Ganssle *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 54; Ioan Mircea Ielciu ‘Doctrinal Aspects in Evagrius Ponticus’, in *Revista Teologică* Vol. 99 No. 1 (2017), 25; see below for exposition of what this means for Christ’s pre-existence.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Theron ‘Creation *stricto sensu*’, in *New Blackfriars* Vol. 89 No. 1020 (2008), 209; this, Paul Helm notes, ‘does not mean that the incarnation was logically necessary any more than it means that creation was logically so’ (Helm ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’, 54).

<sup>76</sup> See Torrance *Space, Time, and Incarnation*, 2-3

<sup>77</sup> Helm ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’, 54

<sup>78</sup> Helm ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’, 54-5

existence, since Christ, in his divine nature, does not exist in time.'<sup>79</sup> Niall Coll makes a similar observation. He writes that '[w]hat lies at the heart of the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence is the belief... that Christ's personal identity is that of the eternal Son of God and that his personal being did not originate when his earthly human history began.'<sup>80</sup> That is, the Logos does not temporally precede Jesus, but neither is the Logos limited to Jesus nor 'absorbed and exhausted in Jesus alone.'<sup>81</sup> Drawing on Gerald O'Collins, Coll agrees that it is better to speak of a 'trans-existence' or 'meta-existence' rather than a pre-existence, so as to avoid the inevitable but incorrect temporal implications.<sup>82</sup> This is nothing but an extrapolation of Jesus as 'the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'<sup>83</sup> As Celia Deane-Drummond comments, Christ is 'the 'first-born'... [in] rank...since temporal priority is hardly what the author is trying to emphasize here.'<sup>84</sup>

This same point can be put differently, in the language already established, the Son is essentially-ordered to Jesus, not accidentally-ordered. Thus, the incarnation is related to the birth of Christ in an identical way to the way *creatio originalis* is related to the Big Bang,<sup>85</sup> i.e. essentially (atemporally) not accidentally (temporally). Just as *creatio originalis* is not confined to a past event (or any event), so the incarnation is not confined to the birth of Jesus. Rather the incarnation is about Jesus' ontological derivation and dependence on the Logos; the created nature depends on the incarnation for its being just as creatures depend on *creatio* for their being. The birth of Jesus no more makes the incarnation a temporal event than the Big Bang makes *creatio* a temporal event. The

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<sup>79</sup> Timothy Pawl *In Defence of Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15; In this way, it is utterly incoherent to 'hypothesize that Jesus had some memories of his pre-incarnate state' (Forrest 'The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis', 129), which makes God temporal.

<sup>80</sup> Niall Coll *Christ in Eternity and Time* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 175

<sup>81</sup> Paulo Gamberini 'The Concept of 'Person': A Dialogue with Contemporary Asian Theology' in *Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol. 76 No. 3 (2011), 265

<sup>82</sup> Coll *Christ in Eternity and Time*, 179; see Gerald O'Collins *Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 238

<sup>83</sup> Col 1.15

<sup>84</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond *Christ and Evolution* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 105; see also Edward Oakes *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids MI.: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 131

<sup>85</sup> Although, obviously, whereas the universe did not need a beginning, Jesus did need a birth. However, this does not detract from the claim that Christ's birth is accidental to Jesus (in the Scotus sense) in the same way that the Big Bang is accidental to the universe.

incarnation, then, does not introduce a change or time in God.<sup>86</sup> That is, just because the birth of Jesus happens in time, does not mean that the incarnation is accidentally-ordered in relation to other events; it is essentially-ordered to other temporal events. Jesus' birth happens in time, but Christ's incarnation is to the universe as the centre of a circle is to its circumference.

Crucial for the argument of this paper, then, if the incarnation is an ontological ordering/relation, not an event in the temporal life of Christ, then Christ as the agent of creation cannot be separate from, or an act that Christ does 'before,' the incarnation. If Christ is 'that in which all things hold together,'<sup>87</sup> then it is the *incarnate* Jesus Christ in which all things hold together. If God 'always' acts through Christ, and Christ 'always' acts as Christ *incarnate*, then 'Christ cannot be other than the cause of all created actuality, and he is such not simply as the Logos, but as the Logos incarnate.'<sup>88</sup> This is likely to be contested by many. Thomas Senor, for example, rejects Stump and Kretzmann's claim of an 'eternal incarnation' in his essay 'Incarnation and Timelessness.'<sup>89</sup> However, arguments to the contrary noted (this paper takes as axiomatic that Stump and Kretzmann are correct), it is nothing more than the logical conclusion of God's atemporality and Christ's agency in creation. It is not 'merely' Christ who 'bridges' the 'gulf' between God and creatures; it is the *incarnate* Christ who is that 'bridge.'<sup>90</sup>

### 5. Christ as the 'Eternal' Relation

Here, then, putting these ideas together, one can say that calling Christ the creator does not mean that Christ is that which (accidentally) causes the Big Bang, but that on which all creatures depend for their being. Creation is not an event (either limited to origins or seen as continuous effective), but relationship; creation is a cause *per se*, not

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<sup>86</sup> Importantly, this use of essential and accidental does not oblige the conclusion that Christ's created nature is an 'essential property' of the Son. Certainly the Son *could* have 'chosen' not to be incarnate, but *that* Christ 'chose' to become incarnate does not mean that such an incarnation is not an eternal event for God, and so essentially-ordered to the birth of Jesus (see Helm 'Divine Timeless Eternity', 54; Theron 'Creation *stricto sensu*', 209; Blount 'On the Incarnation of a Timeless God', 343-4).

<sup>87</sup> Col. 1:17

<sup>88</sup> Donald Keefe *Thomism and the Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 92

<sup>89</sup> Senor 'Incarnation and Timelessness', 157-8

<sup>90</sup> See Douglas Farrow *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1999, p.53; see also Jordan Daniel Wood 'Creation is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the Logos in Maximus Confessor', in *Modern Theology Vol. 34 No. 1* (2018), 93

cause *per accidens*; creation is participation. Thus, for Christ to be the creator means that Christ is that through which all creatures participate. In other words, if creation is an ontological relation, and all are created through Christ, then Christ is that which mediates that ontological relation: the incarnation is a step in the essentially-ordered series between God and creatures, not an accidentally-ordered cause.

*Creatio originalis* and the incarnation are not two accidentally-ordered events that are temporally separated, one of which completes (or re-does/repeats) the other.<sup>91</sup> Rather, the incarnation becomes the mediation of being in an essentially-ordered series - one the 'instrument' or 'vehicle' of the other - indicating the 'flow' of being, not temporal completion. The incarnation *is* the donation of being that is to creatures the *creatio originalis*. In other words, there are not *two* speakings of the word,<sup>92</sup> that would have the effect of seeing both succession (so God cannot be atemporal) and complexity (so God does not do one simple 'thing'), in God. There is one simple and eternal speaking of the word - one divine act - which is the incarnation and is to the creature the donation of being.

Put simply, but more controversially, there is no creation (as an identifiable concrete act/event), only incarnation; if creation is about an ontological relationship that has 'no reference to temporality,' then the incarnation is that relationship: 'it is the *eternal relation* of God to man which is manifest in the Christ.'<sup>93</sup> Christ does not come to re-do or complete what was started previously; Christ *is* that eternal and simple relationship. God is not *also* incarnate *in addition* to being the ground of being; the incarnation is *how* God is the ground of being, the incarnation is *how* creatures depend on God. This means that the incarnation, the cause of grace in the world, is not related to the creature as a Mother is to her daughter, so that after the incarnation (and the reception of grace) creatures can live 'independent' of that incarnation. Rather the incarnation is related to the creature as oxygen is to a flame or the centre of a circle is to its circumference.

Thus, when Norman Wirzba writes that 'the loving power that Jesus models in his feeding the hungry, healing the sick, exorcising the demon-possessed, and befriending the stranger and outcast is the same divine power that brings all creatures

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<sup>91</sup> Between the *creatio originalis* and the 're-doing' - both of which Christ is the agent and, (if Christ is eternally incarnate) both of which are done through Christ incarnate - the distinction is extrinsic. It is only creatures that see the donation of being in Christ as either 'originalis' or 'salvation,' to God they are the same thing: the eternal bestowal of grace in Christ, upon which creatures are as much dependent for their being as they are for salvation/deification.

<sup>92</sup> cf. Wand *The Four Great Heresies*, 27

<sup>93</sup> Paul Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol.2* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 96 (*italics added*)

into being and that daily sustains and nurtures them,<sup>94</sup> he is essentially correct, but that claim requires nuancing. It does not mean that the ministry of Jesus is *another instance* of what God does in creation, but the ministry of Jesus *is* absolutely and literally identical to the *creatio ex nihilo*. That is, the ministry of Jesus is that on which all creatures depend as the circumference of a circle to its centre, not another continuing instance of divine creation in time. The point here is that *creatio* is not an ‘event’ (whether located in the past or completed in the future) but an ontological relationship, and that relationship is uniquely in Christ. Jesus does not cause the Big Bang, the ministry of Jesus is the ontological relationship. The ministry of Jesus, then, becomes the cause *per se* of the universe.<sup>95</sup>

Essentially, ontologically, Christ is the cause of being for all creatures. Christ is that through which all creatures receive being. Both *creatio* and incarnation must be donations of being, yet if it is Christ through which God bestows being on creatures (Christ is the agent of creation and the one mediator), then the incarnation is *how* God bestows being: incarnation is creation. Christ, as agent of creation and mediator, is never creator nor mediator without also being incarnate.<sup>96</sup> Creation happens ‘just as light is produced in the air by the presence of the sun,’<sup>97</sup> yet ‘just as the rays of the sun do not set fire to anything by themselves, so God does not touch our souls with the fire

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<sup>94</sup> Norman Wirzba ‘Creation Through Christ’, in Andrew Torrance & Thomas McCall (eds.) *Christ and the Created Order Vol.2* (Grand Rapids MI.: Zondervan, 2018), 39

<sup>95</sup> This does not mean, as some suggest, that ‘the act of creation happens within the womb of Mary’ (Lincoln Harvey, quoted in Chris Tilling ‘Paul, Christ, and Narrative Time’, in Andrew Torrance & Thomas McCall (eds.) *Christ and the Created Order Vol.2* (Grand Rapids MI.: Zondervan, 2018), 166), as this still perceives creation as a specific event, but just resituates it. Rather, this paper has argued that creation is not an event (cause *per accidens*), but is an ontological relationship (cause *per se*), and that such a relationship cannot exist outside of the human Jesus, but is constituted through him.

<sup>96</sup> I take it as axiomatic, although it needs to be made explicit, that I consider there to be no ontological distinction between humanity and other creatures. Others call this ‘deep incarnation,’ but I consider that *all* creatures (from quarks to humans and everything in between) are addressed in the incarnation. Christ is only accidentally human, but essentially a creature. If feminist theologians emphasise Christ’s humanity, so that his masculinity is unimportant, then we should use the same logic; we emphasise Christ’s createdness, so this his humanity does not exclude other creatures. If, following Paul (Gal 3:28), there is no Jew or Gentile, nor male or female, then neither is there human or non-human; all are one in Christ.

<sup>97</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams *What Sort of Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee WI.: Marquette University Press, 1999), 52; see also Kerr ‘A Thomistic metaphysics of creation’, 345-7; and Matthew R. McWhorter ‘Aquinas on God’s Relation to the World’, *New Blackfriars Vol. 94 No. 1049* (2013).

of supernatural knowledge and experience without Christ.<sup>98</sup> If creation is an 'ontological relationship,<sup>99</sup> the ontological 'derivation of all things from God,<sup>100</sup> if 'God's creative action *just is* creation's dependence on God for its existence,<sup>101</sup> then this ontological relationship/dependence is mediated through Christ: '[t]he word of God is the medium of creation, the dynamic spiritual word which mediates between the silent mystery of the abyss of being and the fullness of concrete, individualized, self-related beings.'<sup>102</sup>

## **6. Kenosis and Participation**

Assuming this interpretation is correct, this leads to a nuanced view of *kenosis*. The previous section argued: (a) 'God is never without his [sic] Logos, the divine Wisdom, in and through whom the world is created, ordered, and sustained;<sup>103</sup> (b) the Logos 'eternally has two natures'<sup>104</sup> so that there is 'no sense talking of the eternal Son of God apart from the incarnation,<sup>105</sup> so the Logos never 'acts' without the created Jesus;<sup>106</sup> and (c) if *creatio ex nihilo* is not 'some putative first moment in the past' but is 'primarily about derivation of all things from God'<sup>107</sup> (i.e. an eternal ontological relationship), then God eternally creates (has relationship with creatures) through the incarnate Logos. If this is the case, then it is not incoherent to hold both a single divine act (literally understood) on the one hand and creation *and* incarnation on the other. *Creatio* is not an act that God does *in addition* to the incarnation; the incarnation is that through which all creatures depend on God. God only does the incarnation, creation is the name of a particular (extrinsic) relationship to the incarnation, not the name of another act that God does in addition to the incarnation. Christ as the agent of creation is that who mediates that relationship, not that who does a particular thing at the beginning of time: to call Jesus 'creator' does not mean that he (accidentally) caused the Big Bang, but that in his Person is the ontological relationship through

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), 106

<sup>99</sup> Baldner & Carroll *Aquinas on Creation*, 16

<sup>100</sup> Davison *Participation in God*, 26

<sup>101</sup> Bishop & Perszyk 'The Divine Attributes and Non-personal Conceptions of God', 614

<sup>102</sup> Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol.1*, 158

<sup>103</sup> Hart *The Experience of God*, 235

<sup>104</sup> Stump & Kretzmann 'Eternity', 453

<sup>105</sup> Helm 'Divine Timeless Eternity', 54

<sup>106</sup> And the human life of Jesus is always cruciform; '[t]he universe assumes the form of Christ - but, O mystery! the man we see is Christ crucified' (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Writings in the Time of War* (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 208).

<sup>107</sup> Davison *Participation in God*, 26

which all creatures derive their being and on which all creatures depend at every moment for their being. This leads to the suggestion that *kenosis* is not about 'emptying' but about participation.

Normally, *kenosis* is understood as an alternative to Chalcedon. The history of the doctrine of *kenosis* and the motivations that lie behind it are well known.<sup>108</sup> Its role in modern theological history is that of an alternative to Chalcedon. Assuming Chalcedon to be incoherent, it postulates instead that Christ sacrificed his divinity in order to become human. David Brown writes that whereas the Chalcedonian theory is 'the view that Jesus was simultaneously God and man', *kenosis* is 'the view that God became man and subsequently became God again.'<sup>109</sup> This has been understood in various ways, from emphasising *krypsis* rather than *kenosis*, in that Christ only hid those attributes (i.e. chose not to utilize them) rather than relinquished them,<sup>110</sup> to arguing that Christ only relinquished accidental attributes (e.g. all 'omni' attributes which presuppose a world over which to have power, know etc. rather than essential attributes).<sup>111</sup>

However, not all see *kenosis* as an alternative to Chalcedon but (recognizing that the effectiveness of the incarnation lies in Jesus being *simultaneously* divine and creature) merely as 'a way of interpreting Chalcedon'<sup>112</sup> and so as overcoming 'the difficulty of conceiving two complete natures united in the one person.'<sup>113</sup> Cyril of Alexandria<sup>114</sup> and Hilary of Poitiers<sup>115</sup> both understood Christ to empty and remain God. More recently, Karl Barth understood *kenosis* to consist 'in a renunciation of His

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<sup>108</sup> See Robert Stackpole *The Incarnation: Rediscovering Kenotic Christology* (British Columbia: The Chartwell Press, 2019); C. Stephen Evans (ed.) *Exploring Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>109</sup> David Brown *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 102-3; see also C. Stephen Evans 'The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology', in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, & Gerald O'Collins (eds.) *The Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 254

<sup>110</sup> David Williams 'Kenosis and the nature of the Persons in the Trinity', in *Koers Vol. 69 No. 4* (2004), 628-9; see also Forrest 'The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis', 127

<sup>111</sup> See Stackpole *The Incarnation: Rediscovering Kenotic Christology*, 91ff.; see Forrest 'The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis', 130

<sup>112</sup> Stephen T. Davis S, 2011, 'The Metaphysics of Kenosis', in, Jonathan Hill & Anna Marmodoro *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 115

<sup>113</sup> Ferdinand Prat *The Theology of St. Paul: Vol.1* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1945), 320

<sup>114</sup> See Ilia Delio 'Is Creation Eternal', in *Theological Studies Vol. 66*; Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 31

<sup>115</sup> Hilary of Poitiers 'On The Trinity', in Henry Bettenson (ed.) *The Later Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 50

being in the form of God alone.<sup>116</sup> Christ does not divest himself of being God; he divests himself of being *only* God. Sergei Bulgakov also writes that '[i]n becoming man, God does not stop being God; even after descending from heaven, he remains in heaven'<sup>117</sup> so that 'without ceasing to be God, God ceases to be God.'<sup>118</sup> For Bulgakov, *kenosis* is not just a possible interpretation of Chalcedon, but is the 'fundamental idea tacitly implied by the Chalcedonian dogma.'<sup>119</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar also defends *kenosis*, arguing that it is the only way to avoid Nestorianism and Monophysitism.<sup>120</sup> Sarah Coakley also argues that *kenosis* need not refer to a divestment, but can be seen as a 'making room for the other.'<sup>121</sup>

There is not the space for a textual analysis of Philippians to determine which is more faithful to Paul's original intentions.<sup>122</sup> Assuming that *kenosis* can legitimately be interpreted as complementing Chalcedon, what is important is that *kenosis* should not be seen as a 'mode' of being incarnate, but as a 'mechanism' for *how* God 'becomes' incarnate. *Kenosis* is how Christ 'makes room' for the created nature, not a solution to the (apparent) contradictions in claiming that Christ was both God and creature. As Graham Ward writes 'the "taking form" and "becoming like" are both modalities of the main verb *kenōō*,<sup>123</sup> that is, *kenosis* describes how Christ becomes a creature, not a necessary divestment to accommodate the other.

In this way, 'emptying' does not mean 'relinquishing,' rather, it explains how the created nature is the *effect* of *kenosis*, *not* how the divine and created natures are related *after* the incarnation (i.e. once Christ is human). Indeed, 'one could more truly

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<sup>116</sup> Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics: Study Edition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 2009), IV, 59, 1 (p.172-3); see also Bruce McCormack 'Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology Vol. 8 No. 3* (2006), 248

<sup>117</sup> Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 220; See also 225-9

<sup>118</sup> Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 221

<sup>119</sup> Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 239; see also 236

<sup>120</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1990), vii-ix

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Coakley 'Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian

Feminist Writing" in Daphne Hampson (ed.) *Swallowing a Fishbone: Feminist Theologians Debate Christology* (London: SPCK, 1996)

<sup>122</sup> See Ralph Martin *Carmen Christi* (Grand Rapids MI.: William B Eerdmans, 1983), 165-96

<sup>123</sup> Graham Ward 'Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection', in Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash and Graham Ward *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1999), 21

say that kenosis involves gain rather than loss.<sup>124</sup> Edwin Chr. van Driel's claim that there is distinction between the 'classical theologian' who 'thinks about the Incarnation in terms of an *addition*' and the *kenotic* theologian who 'understands the Incarnation in terms of a *divestment*'<sup>125</sup> is not accurate; *kenosis* can be understood as *how* Christ 'makes room' for (and so 'adds') a second nature.

To put it differently (and somewhat speculatively), for the 'anti-Chalcedonians' *kenosis* was a cause *per accidens*, after which God has changed. The Scotist distinction, then, is absolutely crucial for understanding *kenosis* properly; it is not an event in the temporal life of God (or Christ) which necessarily treats divine activity and creaturely activity in competition, rather, it is an eternal event of 'making room' that, *uniquely* in Christ, God makes room for the other to participate. *Kenosis* is not the name of a cause *per accidens*, after which Christ is no longer God; rather, *kenosis* is the name of a relationship, a cause *per se*, an atemporal, eternal, 'making room,' through which Jesus has being. *Kenosis* is the name of the ontological ordering/relation that takes place in Christ's person.

If, as this paper has suggested, that the ontological relation that takes place in Christ's person is that through which all creatures participate in God - the hypostatic union is that which mediates the dependence of all creatures on God, then *kenosis* becomes the divine side of an ontological relationship with all creatures, mediated through the incarnation. Indeed, Graham Ward is explicit that with *kenosis* 'we are concerned with the relationship between the Logos and mediation,'<sup>126</sup> *kenosis* is *how* Christ is the mediator (remembering that Christ *has* to be both God and creature simultaneously in order to function as mediator). Christ as creator is not Christ as the accidentally-ordered 'pusher' of the first domino; Christ as creator is Christ as mediator of being. *Kenosis* is that on which creatures depend for their being, not an accidentally prior act that makes creation and creaturely freedom possible. *Kenosis* is about participation not divestment, thus, 'not only do rational beings participate in the logos,' but '[w]ithout their participation in the word, the entire universe would revert to the nothingness from which it came.'<sup>127</sup> Jordan Daniel Wood seems to hint at this idea,

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<sup>124</sup> Sarah Coakley 'Kenosis: Theological Meaning and Gender Connotations', in John Polkinghorne (ed.) *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Cambridge MA.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 195

<sup>125</sup> Edwin Chr. van Driel 'The Logic of Assumption', in, C. Stephen Evans (ed.) *Exploring Kenotic Christology* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 265-6

<sup>126</sup> Ward 'Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection', 20

<sup>127</sup> Samuel Powell *Participating in God* (Minneapolis MN.: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003), 18

writing that '[t]he cosmos is at once Christ, who generates it by self-identifying with it,' so that 'the world only *is* because of the self-evacuation of the Word.'<sup>128</sup>

*Kenosis* is concerned with ontological dependency, not literally emptying or divestment. *Kenosis* is the name of an essentially-ordered series, the identical essentially-ordered series that we call participation. From the creaturely perspective it is called participation, from the divine perspective it is called *kenosis*. That is, the *Logos* is a 'hierarchical' mediator; the *Logos* mediates - i.e. passes on being - between the Father and creatures hierarchically (essentially-ordered), rather than temporally. Yet, it is not just the *Logos* who does this, it is the *Logos incarnate*; the hypostatic union becomes the 'point of mediation,' the eternal 'point' in the person of the Son, where being is passed on to creatures. All creatures depend on God, and they depend on God through the Son, and the hypostatic union is the point of dependency. The incarnation is *how* God mediates participation; *kenosis* is how there can be a relationship between a transcendent atemporal and immutable God and the temporal and mutable universe.

Here, then, those theologians who link the *kenosis* of the Son with the *kenosis* of the Father can help to further strengthen this claim. Bulgakov writes that 'Sonhood is already *eternal kenosis*.'<sup>129</sup> Balthasar calls this the 'eternal "super-Kenosis"' of the Father.<sup>130</sup> In doing so, *kenosis* is linked with creating, so 'the inner-divine processions are the condition of the possibility for a creation.'<sup>131</sup> The 'super-*kenosis*' of the Father - the procession of the Son from the Father - is that which makes creation - by implication, the *kenosis* of the Son of God - possible. It is important to ensure that the procession of the Son is different from creation (there is a distinction between the Son receiving being from Father through *kenosis* and creatures receiving being through Jesus in *kenosis*; the Son is equal to the Father, but creatures are not equal to (participate in) the Son), but there is a sense here in which the Son receives being from the Father through *kenosis* and the Son then 'passes on' being through the *kenosis* of the incarnation.<sup>132</sup> As Bulgakov writes Christ is 'pre-eternally "sacrificed" in the

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<sup>128</sup> Wood 'Creation is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the *Logoi* in Maximus Confessor', 98-9

<sup>129</sup> Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 99

<sup>130</sup> Balthasar *Mysterium Paschale*, vii-ix; see also Hans Urs von Balthasar *Theo-Drama II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 154; Aristotle Papanikolaou 'Person, *Kenosis* and Abuse: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation', in *Modern Theology Vol. 19 No. 1* (2003), 48; Ward 'Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection', 45

<sup>131</sup> Balthasar *Mysterium Paschale*, vii-ix

<sup>132</sup> See Giles Emery 'Trinity and Creation', in Rik Van Nieuwenhove & Joseph Wawrykow (eds.) *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 59; there are also significant links with Pseudo-Dionysius (see below).

creation of the world;<sup>133</sup> the *kenosis* of Christ *is* creation. Thus, Christ's generation from the Father (pre-existence), the incarnation (firstborn), and *creatio* form an ontological (essentially-ordered) series, not a temporal (accidentally-ordered) one. Christ does not create *and then* become incarnate, rather, there is an ontological derivation in which the Son, who receives being from the Father, passes on being to all creatures *through* his being incarnate in Jesus.<sup>134</sup> *Creatio originalis* does not temporally precede the incarnation; the incarnation is ontologically prior to *creatio originalis*, and is temporally and numerically identical to it.<sup>135</sup>

There is clearly a link here with Pseudo-Dionysius and hierarchy. For Pseudo-Dionysius, being is passed on 'down' the hierarchies to all creatures. As Sarah Wear and John Dillon write, hierarchy is the way that 'God relates to his creation' and, therefore, 'the activity of the hierarchy is the act of God's creation.'<sup>136</sup> Significantly, 'every

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<sup>133</sup> Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 129

<sup>134</sup> See Davison *Participation in God*, 209; there is a link here with Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Bulgakov, who situate the *kenosis* in the Godhead (see above).

<sup>135</sup> This also leaves the question of other acts that in the Bible temporally precede the incarnation, and requires a considerable amount of demythologising (especially of the Old Testament). For example, '[i]t is often said that the action of God even in the Old Testament is that of the Son, in a pre-incarnate state' (Williams *Kenōsis of God*, 95), yet there cannot be thought of a pre-existence in which Christ acts without the human Jesus. Thus, for example, Jesus explicitly identifies himself as the 'I am' of the burning bush in Exodus, but this should not be taken (as Peter Forrest puts it ('The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis', 129)) as a memory that Jesus has of a past event. However, it admittedly seems strange to suggest that this event is a revelation of Jesus to Moses that is in no way separate from the incarnation, and not have Moses preach Christ incarnate. Stump and Kretzmann have argued that all the inspirations of God are extrinsic accidental characteristics of the one simple act (Stump & Kretzmann 'Absolute Simplicity', 355), and so, drawing, on this, it would be possible to suggest something similar, perhaps in relation to Karl Rahner's idea of anonymous Christians in which Moses' preaching was a genuine expression of the incarnation but in a Hebrew context. This also requires a 'full' or 'strong' doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*. The divine and human energy in Christ are certainly distinct (duothelitism must be upheld), but they are also 'performed' by a single person. This means that Christ is not sometimes acting as God and sometimes acting as human, but 'He did all things as the God-Man.' (Bulgakov *The Lamb of God*, 237). As Pseudo-Dionysius writes, in Christ there is one 'theandric' activity (*Collected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 265), which is not a confusion of God and human, but an acknowledgment that Christ always acts as both. This means, quite literally, that those actions attributed to the 'pre-existent' Logos are not 'performed' without and/or outwith the human Jesus (see Helm 'Divine Timeless Eternity', 54).

<sup>136</sup> Sarah Wear & John Dillon *Dionysius the Areopagite And The Neoplatonist Tradition* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 51, 66

hierarchy ends in Jesus;<sup>137</sup> it is through Jesus that being is 'passed on' to all creatures.<sup>138</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams notes the same idea in Thomas Aquinas: 'as God is fontal source of natural being (esse) and goodness in creatures, so Aquinas envisions a cascading flow of grace: from Godhead into the human soul hypostatically united to it; from the soul of Christ into all the members of the body of which he is the head.'<sup>139</sup> Thus, drawing on Paul's instruction to '[b]e imitators of me, as I am of Christ,'<sup>140</sup> all creatures imitate (participate) in God, through Christ, so that '[i]f [Jesus'] life was the imitation of the Father, their life as disciples was to imitate him.'<sup>141</sup> As moral as such an imitation might be, it is primarily ontological; the ontological hierarchy through Christ, Jesus and to all creatures is characterised by a *kenosis* 'down' the hierarchy and a participation 'up' it,<sup>142</sup> *kenosis* and participation are thus literally identical, they explain the same ontological relationship from both sides. That is, from the divine side, it looks like *kenosis*; from the creature side, it looks like participation/imitation.<sup>143</sup> That ontological hierarchy is essentially-ordered (Torstein Tollefsen describes it as 'vertical'),<sup>144</sup> it has no accidental relation (i.e. it is not coincident with any putative first (or any) moment), and so is unconnected with history and providence.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius *Collected Works*, 236

<sup>138</sup> See David Brown 'Teilhard de Chardin and Pseudo-Dionysius: Convergent Evolution, Hierarchy, and Divine Activity,' in *Heythrop Journal* (forthcoming)

<sup>139</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams *What Sort of Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee WI.: Marquette University Press, 1999), 52

<sup>140</sup> 1 Cor 11.1

<sup>141</sup> Ernest Tinsley *The Imitation of God in Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 100; see also Elizabeth Castelli *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 89-117

<sup>142</sup> See Ashley M. Purpura *God, Hierarchy, and Power: Orthodox Theologies of Authority from Byzantium* (New York NY.: Fordham University Press, 2018), 24

<sup>143</sup> There is also the element of imitation of Christ. If 'to imitate God is to participate in God' (Torstein Theodor Tollefsen *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163; see also David O. Brown *Incarnation and Neo-Darwinism: Evolution, Ontology, and Divine Activity* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2019), 144), then participation through Christ means that all creatures imitate Christ; to be created is to participate in God through Christ, which has the identical meaning of to be created is to imitate Christ.

<sup>144</sup> See Torstein Theodor Tollefsen *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113; see also Philip Sherrard *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 239

<sup>145</sup> There are also significant ecclesial and sacramental dimensions to this question (e.g. the Church is the 'continuation of the incarnation' and it is through the ecclesial hierarchy that the divine light is 'passed on') that lie outside the scope of this essay.

Here, then, responses can be made to those who criticise *kenosis*, such as Andrew Davison, who writes that *kenosis* leads to a ‘truncated’ God.<sup>146</sup> As an alternative to Chalcedon, certainly *kenosis* is non-participatory; but this does not mean that *all* interpretations of *kenosis* are. Rather, drawing on the idea of ‘making (ontological) room,’ it could be suggested that *kenosis* is the ‘divine side’ of the relationship of dependence that is the creature’s participation in God. If *kenosis* is creation, and creation means to be given being, then *kenosis* is the divine side of how creatures have being by derivation and are at all times dependent on that being. In this sense, *kenosis* does not mean that God in Christ relinquishes all the (unnecessary) divine attributes, but that God ontologically ‘makes room’ for the other. In this way, participation is not a ‘sharing,’ which Holmes Rolston III claims ‘has the Old English and Germanic root *sker*, to cut into parts.’<sup>147</sup> *Kenosis* is not God *sharing* ‘being’ - which would mean that God and creatures are in a ‘zero-sum’ game - but is participation in God’s being. For God to ‘make room’ is not for others to *share* a part of God but to *participate in* God.

Davison *et al*’s problem with *kenosis* then is that they assume that it means ‘share’ rather than ‘participate,’ but it is not entirely clear that *kenosis* must only be a participation *of* (i.e. sharing) and not a participation *in* God.<sup>148</sup> *Kenosis* is not God sharing, but creatures participating.<sup>149</sup> In this way, when *tzimtzum* is said to create a ‘space,’ outside of God, within which creation takes place, this is nothing but another way of saying that the universe participates in God as its being. The ‘self-emptying’ is analogical. God does not literally ‘self-empty.’ Rather, *kenosis* is a ‘symbol’ or ‘image’ that points to participation. Davison therefore looks at *kenosis* from the wrong perspective; *kenosis* is not a ‘pushing out’ of divinity, but a ‘letting in’ (or ‘letting be’) of creatures - a letting in that is the ground of their being and *how* creatures depend on God for their being. The Christological *kenosis*, then, is a *tzimtzum*; it describes the specific (personal) participation of the human Jesus in the eternal Logos.

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<sup>146</sup> Davison *Participation in God*, 212

<sup>147</sup> Holmes Rolston III ‘*Kenosis* and Nature’, in John Polkinghorne (ed.) *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Cambridge MA.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 48

<sup>148</sup> Davison *Participation in God*, 137

<sup>149</sup> There is a connection here with *epektasis*; the inexhaustibility of God in terms of an ever-greater potential for more and closer participation in God is mirrored in God’s ever-greater ‘ability’ to ‘make-room’ for the other in *kenosis*. God descended that we might ascend; God became a creature that we might become God; God (in Christ) self-empties that we might participate in God (through Christ).

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has made two arguments: (a) if God never acts without the logos, and the logos is eternally incarnate, and *creatio* is ontological relationship not 'putative past event,' then there is no contradiction in holding that the incarnation is the single divine act, through which creatures are ontologically derivative and dependent; and, that being the case, (b) *kenosis* as understood as 'making ontological room' for creatures to participate in God becomes a more Chalcedonian-friendly interpretation of the hypostatic union.

To be sure, this is a speculative way of looking at Christian doctrine. Most exponents of *kenosis* treat it as an accidentally-ordered cause that is an alternative to traditional doctrines of God or incarnation: Christ empties and *then* re-acquires divinity or divine attributes. Likewise, traditional Christianity explicitly separates creation and the incarnation, although the east is more open to seeing them as being two parts of one act. There will be those who question the role of the cross or Holy Spirit in such a theological paradigm as the one presented here. There might be those who question the necessary collapse of creation into deification. This does not even take into account those who see the incarnation as reason enough to dismiss divine atemporality and simplicity.

However, this paper has sought to do nothing except suggest that, if one follows through the logic on a number of these issues, such as *creatio* as ontological relation and the eternity of the incarnation, then there is no theological problem with suggesting that the incarnation is *how* creatures can depend on God, who is utterly transcendent of all creatures. In other words, 'the question of creation has never simply concerned some event that may have happened "back then," at the beginning of time, or some change between distinct physical states...but has always concerned the *eternal relation* between logical possibility and logical necessity, the contingent and the absolute, the conditioned and the unconditioned,'<sup>150</sup> and it is that '*eternal relation* of God to man which is manifest in the Christ.'<sup>151</sup>

This does two things. First, it provides a possible solution to the question of how creation and the incarnation can be related in a paradigm which accepts the validity of the idea that there is only one divine act. The incarnation and creation are essentially-ordered, not accidentally-ordered, that is, the incarnation acts as that which mediates an ontological ordering or relation. Second, it leads to the suggestion that *kenosis* becomes entirely identical with participation. *Kenosis* is that which permits creatures to participate in God.

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<sup>150</sup> Hart *The Experience of God*, 304 (*italics added*)

<sup>151</sup> Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol.2*, 96 (*italics added*)