

How God 'Emptied' Himself To Provide for Mankind

THEOLOGY OF SPACE

(Seventh in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

Our thinking about Christ too often is like looking from the open end of the funnel to a narrow point at the end. We think of God as opening the funnel by creation; then He begins to narrow His relations to the cosmos to a fallen race on a thorn-infested earth; after that, His activity as Lord of history is confined to the people of Israel, and finally He appears as a speck on the horizon of the Roman Empires.

There is the danger that we fix Christ as a little point on the horizontal line of cosmic and human history, or that we envisage Him as unrelated to the past except through promises made concerning His coming. He becomes like a mythical character who lands on this earth in a flying saucer, within a space-time continuum of a Roman province and a few decades, and then quickly is blasted off the earth from the launching pad of the Cross.

Instead of being a point on a line, Christ is the line. The line is time-space and the continuum of the universe. Once we see Him only as a dot on a graph, we isolate Him from the universe, or what we called "B.C. (Before the Cosmos) and A.D. (After D-Day of the Cosmos or the End of Things)." He then has nothing to do with Time and Space in their infinite reaches. No longer is He the Alpha and Omega, or the A and Z of all creation Who holds dominion over all things, gives coherence and order to evolution, and holds all things in the palm of His Hand.

Seek a truer picture of His relation to creation in terms of two Greek words used to describe His activity: Kenosis and Pleroma. If some giant scooped up a flat field, he would make a valley; if he piled up what he had scooped out, he would make a mountain. Two things would then go together: Emptying and Filling. Kenosis is an emptying; Pleroma is a filling.

Kenosis Means Emptying

All through Time, even though it be many billions of years, there has been an "Emptying" of God, a gradual manifestation of Himself. Love was made to be a twin, which means that its nature is to share. God "emptied" His Being by creation of the cosmos, so that all things share in existence, just as pages of this paper share whiteness. But no one page is the cause of the whiteness of the other; the cause is outside all that is shared. So the Being which brought beings into existence was outside them while being in them.

God also emptied His life by making the plant kingdom for life is nobler than the "being" of carbon. He "emptied" His knowledge of goals and purposes by implanting instincts in animals; He "emptied" His logos or wisdom by making man logical, or by giving him the power to think.

He "emptied" the secrets of His plans for Creation by revealing them to the patriarchs and prophets and the people of Israel. He emptied Himself of His glory by becoming a servant of man; finally, He emptied His manhood of blood by giving His Life.

"For He, Who always had been God by nature, did not cling to His Prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped Himself of all privilege, (Kenosis) by consenting to be a slave by nature, and by being born a mortal man. And, having become man, He humbled Himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death He died was the death of a common criminal". (Phil. 2/5-8)

Picture a rich man giving all He had to His children, and then becoming poverty-stricken, and you have the Kenosis Paul described: "Remember the generosity of Jesus Christ, the Lord of us all. He was rich beyond our telling, yet He became poor for your sakes so that His poverty might make you rich". (2 Cor. 8/9)

"Kenosis" is the nature of love: he who keeps back does not love totally. Kindness is measured not so much by what we give, but what we have left. Love does not mean to have; it means to be had. Love does not own; it disowns self. Love is not a circle wrapped in its only circuit of egotism; Love is the Cross with arms outstretched to embrace all humanity.

From the first atom with which this cosmos began, to the last absolute given to the soul of the sinner, God, through Christ, has been pouring out Himself in endless self-emptyings. As a king might bestow bounties on his subjects during a triumphal march, so too, Divinity has left a blazing kenotic trail up to that moment when the last drop of His blood was emptied from His body by the piercing of the heart with a Roman sergeant's sword.

An abbot of the ninth century, Paschasius Radbert, awed by this expanding surrender, wrote: "It is pure folly to look in a confused or hidden place for Him Who fills all things, Who will one day overturn all things, and shed His Light on each one of them".

The "Scandal" of Christ

Translate Kenosis spiritually, and it becomes self-abasement, humiliation and making oneself naught in order to serve others. It is precisely this which creates a "scandal" in the Life of Christ. What disparity seems to exist between Christ the Word, the Maker of the Cosmos, and that same Christ being born of a woman as the original Cave-Man under the floor of the world in Bethlehem! The proud mind of man cannot grasp why He, Who made the earth, should be under it at birth, be lifted above it to suffer, and then be buried beneath it to die.

But it must be remembered that to heal self-

exaltation and egotism, God chose the way of self-humiliation. No man who loved snakes, and wanted to teach them not to bite poisonously, would leave his body aside and put his soul into the creeping, slinking form of a rattler. Well, is that comparable to God divesting Himself of the glory of His Divinity and taking the learning, suffering body of a man, and then living with stupid men?

"We just cannot think of a king who does not act as a king, so it is hard for us to think of a God Who acts like a peasant, and washes the feet of disciples who would not even wash one another's feet.

During this Emptied Life on earth, we get only a few glances of His Lordship and His cosmic consciousness with the Father: "He makes His sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends rain on the honest and dishonest". (Mat. 5/45) He warns that He will come again, and that all this planetary whirling mass will disappear. It is not likely that God will smash the cosmos; it looks as if man will do it as a Frankenstein monster, lighting the Last Night of the cosmos with nuclear blasting.

But whatever it be, Our Lord now and then lets man know the universe is His: "The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give her light, the stars will fall from the sky. The celestial powers will be shaken". (Mat. 24/29) When the disciples pointed to the glory of the temple, which was then being built, He said that even that would pass away as an unsubstantial pageant faded, and as a rehearsal and mock trial of what the Last Days "when the powers of Heaven will rock on their foundations" (Mark 13/26); and when he will "come again with a Power extending from the farthest bounds of earth to the farthest bounds of heaven". (Mark 13/28) Even the earth, which now has place only for the "go-getters", will belong to the meek, according to His right of disposal of the earth. (Mat. 5/5)

Christ Empties Himself

Think of Christ at many moments of His earthly life, — whether it be allowing "the unconscious waters to see their God and blush" at Cana; whether it be asking a woman for a drink — He Who made all the fountains and the deep; whether it be His seven silences before the false charges of Pilate and Herod; whether it be borrowing an ass, an animal which is the very antithesis of appearing "triumphant"; whether it be being "led like a lamb to slaughter without opening His mouth"; whether it be in His weariness as He rests at a well; or whether it be providing a Roman holiday by being lifted up at the cross-roads of Jerusalem. At the moment we see Him, He is:

- "In the primacy of all created things
- In Him everything in heaven and earth was created . . .
- The whole universe has been created Through Him and for Him.
- He exists before everything,
- And all things are held together by him." (Col. 1/17-18)

Despite His slave-character, He is the One who tells Nicodemus: "No one ever went up into heaven except the One Who came down from heaven, the Son of Man Whose home is in heaven". (John 3/13) Notice that He says "Son of Man", that is God in His humiliated human framework — a title used of Himself 81 times in the Gospels. No title better expresses the ultimate in Kenosis than this: "Son of Man". It means that there has been a descent of the pre-existent Divine Heavenly One, to the loneliness of the human situation.

Our Lord here gives a hint of His Ascension, the purpose of which will be to "fill up" the universe. If He will ascend, then certainly He has descended. (Eph. 4/9, 10) If there was "no room for Him" in the inn in His Kenosis, then in His Pleroma all creation will reflect His glory. The initiative of love came from God, not man. He first loved us and that love was "unto the end", or to the point of complete self-giving as "Lord from heaven". (1 Cor. 15/17)

But the humbling of God-Man, His seeming powerlessness in being crucified; His seeming mental slowness in giving no "come-back" to mockers; His becoming a child and then wanting all His followers to be as little children — is bound to have vindication. The valley will become the mountain; the Kenosis will be like Pleroma even to the extent that "God will be all in all".

"Because He emptied Himself God has now lifted Him on high And has given Him the Name beyond all names, So that, at the name of Jesus, Every knee shall bow Whether in heaven or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, every tongue shall confess That Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This "Filling-up" of all things in Christ, this Pleroma, as a reward for Kenosis or Emptying, will be the subject next week.

Fulton J. Sheen

The Case for Spiritual Therapy

By MSGR. PHILIP E. MCGHAN

I wish to comment on recent Elmira discussions on the subject, "Do patients want spiritual care?"

After 28 years as a hospital chaplain, I feel that I can answer "Definitely."

If the physician, in a dialogue, should state that the patient in an illness or before surgery does not request the services of a spiritual adviser, he may not understand how the request is usually made. The patient will not ordinarily request a priest or minister from the physician, but more often, from a nurse, aide, staff Sister or friend.

Although the priest or minister administers primarily to the essentially spiritual element of the patient, he is, I believe, especially equipped to deal with the emotional difficulties of that same patient.

True, he is not a psychiatrist or even a professional psychologist, but theology does not disregard the stark fact that the rational being has an emotional element in his make-up.

Emotion is not, in itself, bad. It is defined by the experts as a "movement of the sensory appetite, following upon conscious recognition of some stimulus, characterized by definite modifications in the regulated activities of the body." Emotions, in themselves, are good.

I shall not go into detail on the factual matter of emotions but simply mention that, unless controlled, emotion can over-

rule the intellect, which means, practically, good judgment. Often the sick need help to control emotions.

The presence of the priest in the sick-room not only may bring a psychological comfort, but, as "another Christ," he carries with him the grace of sacramental priesthood. He, above all human beings, is appointed by God to administer more than natural healing. This spiritual ministry and reasonably so, affects the corporal nature of the patient. For we are neither pure matter nor pure spirit; we are a combination of both and God rules both elements.

It has been my daily experience in hospital service here that many patients of different faiths asked for the services of the chaplain. All who wanted me seemed to know, as St. Paul reminds us, the need for religion is impressed "on the fleshy tablets of the heart."

I can recall one Jewish man, who had long since ceased practicing his religion. I approached him with the thought that the God of Abraham loved him and would forgive.

I can distinctly remember his reaction as he asked, "Do you really believe that?" The end result was, I believe, that he died in peace.

One of the most gratifying factors of my chaplaincy was the help I was able to give to the unchurched or those who had fallen from the Christian Faith.

I mention these instances to prove that religious need is not something superficial and unappealing. For, it is not always as simple as saying that "patients do not request spiritual help."

The physician should try to realize that adequate spiritual therapy is, indeed, very important in bringing peace to a worried patient. It is easy, consciously or subconsciously, to foster the thought that man is merely material, or just a body, without a spiritual element. But to fail to realistically recognize this fact is fatal.

Let us be most realistic. There are many sciences, they should be mutually helpful. One scientist, however, cannot be a specialist in all branches. To recognize this is to truly help the whole person, each one using his own special gifts.



Word for Sunday

No Resurrection Without Death

By Father Albert Shamon

St. Mark's Gospel is split almost in two. The first half deals with the mighty acts of Christ—the second half, with His teaching, especially His teaching that the Messiah must die. Three times, like the solemn tolling of a bell, He proclaims, "They will put the Son of Man to death."

But the apostles just couldn't buy that. The men who knew Christ best misunderstood Him most. They had seen His power—how He made the dead rise, blind eyes see, and howling winds and surly seas subside. Surely, He could not die. They had experienced His miracles, His thoughtfulness, His concern for

others. He could not leave them orphans! The apostles were blinder than the blind man who sat at the outskirts of Jericho.

In each of His Passion predictions, our Lord always promised final victory in resurrection. The grave was not His goal.

A theologian has written that "the present renewal in the Church is essentially a rediscovery of the Resurrection."

Any age which regards itself as rediscovering the resurrection, the importance to the Passion, and the cross. It is not a question of the Passion or the Resurrection. It is an error to stress either side to the exclusion of the other. Both are needed: there is no resurrection without death. But of the two, the natural error is to gloss over the cross. For who likes mortification, self-denial? Yet death is so necessary for resurrection that there cannot be a Christianity without tears.

The point, however, I think we tend to forget is that Christianity did not bring the tears to the world, nor the cross for that matter. The tears were already in the world, so was the cross.

Christ came and took our cross, not to cast a shadow on our lives, but to take the cross out of our lives. He took our cross that we might learn to take the love from His Christ brought not suffering and death, but hope and love. He did not tell us to take up His cross, but to take up our own. "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him . . . take up his cross everyday and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). Our cross was laid on His shoulder, and because it is, it rests more lightly on our own.

Joyce Kilmer sloshed through the mud of France, with tattering pack on his back — his cross — he could bear all because Christ bore His.

I may not lift a hand to clear My eyes of salty drops that sear. (Then shall my tickle soul for-get)

Thy agony of Bloody Sweat? My rifle hand is stiff and numb (From "They pierced him red rivers come),

Lord, Thou didst suffer more for me Than all the hosts of land and sea.

So let me render back again This millionth of Thy gift. Amen

Still Need For Parish Societies

Traditional parish societies are under fire today. Their critics call them old-fashioned, irrelevant, and divisive of family unity. In these days of frequent Communion, they say, no longer are such societies needed for promoting monthly Communion.

As for the traditional parish Communion Breakfast, the question is asked: "How could an apostle of the agglomeration find anything very significant for the welfare of Christianity in such a setting of hot coffee, sweet rolls and a speech?"

Knowledgeable defenders of traditional societies would be the first to admit that their organizations are not perfect and need some modernizing.

They would certainly not agree, however, that the time has come to disband these organizations. It would certainly be a shame to let this vigorous "grassroots" movement simply come to an end, without an attempt to salvage its tremendous potential for good.

Consequently, serious attempts are being made to determine new definitions, new dimensions, and new directions for parish societies.

If the traditional parish organizations are going to continue to live and grow and be useful in the modern day, a way must be found to bring them up-to-date and provide them with meaningful specific objectives which are relevant to the needs of the Church today.

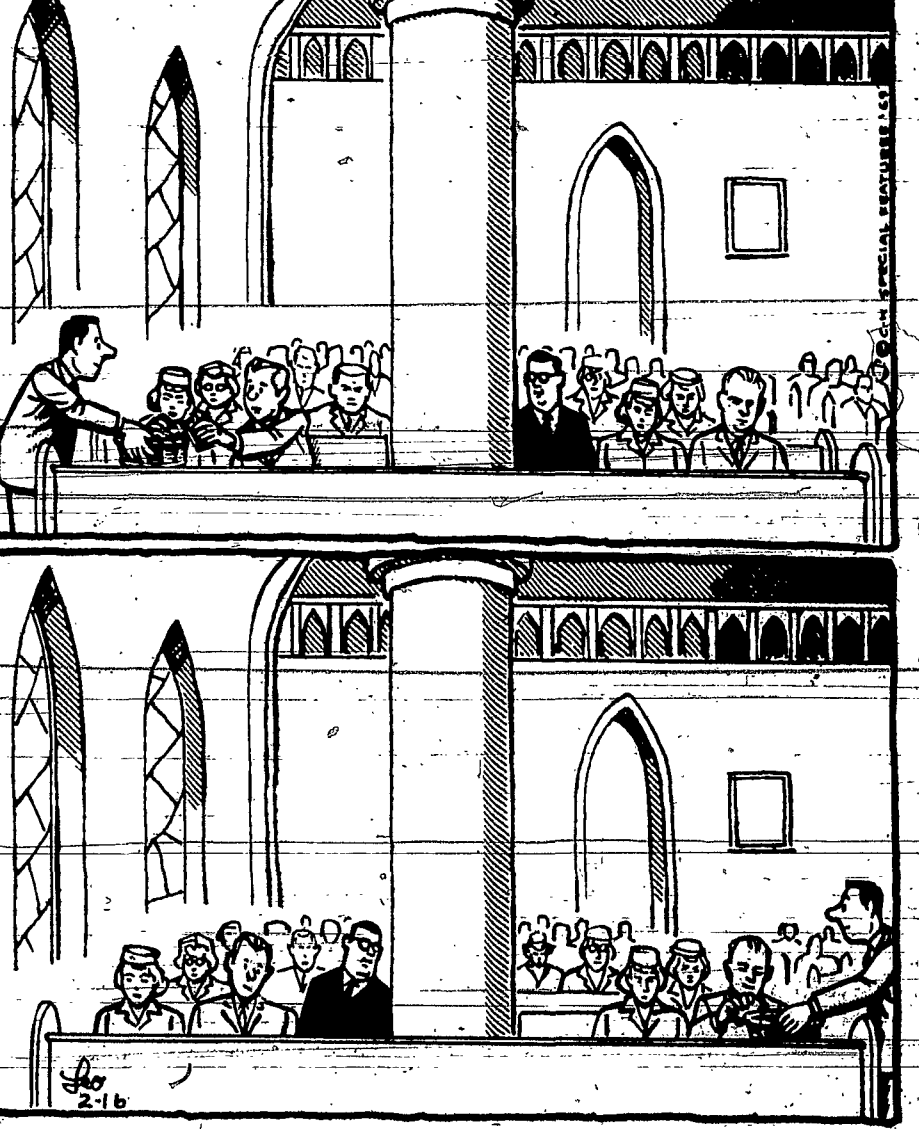
The bringing of new life and meaning to parish organizations will demand planning and organization on the part of the leaders. It will require conviction, determination and generosity on the part of the members. However, the potentialities for good of these societies are still tremendous.

Vatican II declared: "The parish offers an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level inasmuch as it brings together the many different human beings within its boundaries and merges them into the universality of the Church. The laity should accustom themselves to working in their parish in union with the priests."

"As far as possible, they ought to provide helpful collaboration for every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish."

"These associations should also be promoted which either directly or indirectly pursue a supernatural objective, that is, either the attaining of a more perfect life, the spreading of the Gospel of Christ, the promoting of Christian doctrine, the increase of public worship, the pursuing of social aims or the performing of works of piety and charity." — *Liturgical Sunday Buletin, 2/2/69.*

CHURCH HUMOR



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My dear and bel Christ:
Lent means two penance. Neither won Many will admit they few will ever admit t
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Two parishes—A Fairport, and St. Church, Perinton estant churches in are sponsoring a s ings "intended to major problems f in his quest for
The first sessio p.m. Sunday, Fe Methodist Church panel" on the quest Ambition and S ble", will be W professor in the ment of St. John F Harold Pettey, pas United Church of Cooke, member of Methodist Soci
Kenneth Sarkis, Lady of Lourdes principal speaker First Baptist Chu is "Disillusionmen Generation."
The third meet at Assumption Ch ture, a movie, " Merry-Go-Round," Modern Nomad," presentation of the philosophers.