The Renosis of the Spirit

H. Wheeler Robinson

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The Kenosis of the Spirit.

By Principal the Reverend H. Wheeler Robinson, M.A., Regent's Park College, London.

In an important reference to the Person of Christ (Ph 2^{7}), the Apostle Paul speaks of Him in His pre-existent glory as One who counted it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, in the assumption of our human nature. For many centuries the phrase 'emptied Himself' has arrested the attention of the theologian. How is the Jesus of history related to the eternal Son of God, who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Co 8^{9})? What attributes and prerogatives of the Logos-Son were laid aside, what was the emptying or 'kenosis' (to use the noun corresponding to Paul's verb, ἐκένωσε) in making God manifest in the flesh? That there were some limitations or deprivations is evident: the life of a Jewish Carpenter from the manger to the Cross, the use of one particular Aramaic dialect, with all the associations of its vocabulary, the social environment of a particular race at one particular point of its development—all these remind us that the phrase 'emptied Himself' must have a real meaning.

With the problems of the Incarnation this article is not concerned; but its title is intended to suggest that there are very similar problems when we think of the work of the Holy Spirit in continuation of the work of Christ. Such a continuation the New Testament clearly teaches (Jn $16^{12\text{-}14}$), and in the teaching of the Apostle Paul, the work of the Spirit covers the whole realm of the work of Christ, since the risen Christ is Spirit, life-giving Spirit, and life in Christ is life in the Spirit, whilst the indwelling Christ is not to be distinguished from the indwelling Spirit, so close is the unity of operation. The very atmosphere of the New Testament, which makes it different from every other book in the world, is this Real Presence of the Son of God, not only in the narrative of the Gospels, but in the activities of His spiritual representative, the Holy Spirit, in the Acts and the Epistles and the Apocalypse. It would be easy to show in detail how personal in character this Presence is, a Presence to be grieved by our sins (Eph 4^{30}), insulted by wilful relapse (He 10^{29}), teaching our infant lips to cry, Abba, and witnessing with our spirit that we are God's children (Ro $8^{15f.}$), helping our weakness and making intercession for us (v.^{26}). But the title of this article limits us to a particular aspect of all this—the truth that the Real Presence of God by the Spirit of His Son in the hearts of believers involves a continued act of humiliation, a continued kenosis or emptying, as real in its own way as was that of the Incarnation.

The assumption here made is that Christian experience is always supernatural in character, not to be explained from below, but only from above, and that it is explained only through the indwelling of man by God. This is the teaching of the New Testament. 'I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal 2^{20}). It is an overwhelming thought. Dr. Timothy Richard once asked a Chinese scholar, who had read the New Testament through several times, what struck him most. He answered that 'the most wonderful thing to him was that a man could become a temple of the Holy Spirit.' We have only to expand the thought, and it becomes a spiritual philosophy of the universe, as Professor Pringle-Pattison has seen, perhaps more clearly than any other of our leading philosophers. He speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity as being, when rightly understood, 'the profoundest and therefore the most intelligible, attempt to express the indwelling of God in man,' and remarks that 'if God is not thus active in the time-process, bearing with His creatures the whole stress and pain of it, the immanence of the Creative Spirit becomes an unmeaning phrase' (*The Spirit*, p. 18). If the New Testament doctrine of the indwelling Spirit were a vital part of men's thoughts about the Christian faith, we might have been spared the modern revival of the idea of a limited God. The Divine sympathy, nearness, and co-operation are adequately emphasized only when we teach that the transcendent God has emptied Himself to meet our need, not once only in the historical event of the Incarnation, but continually in the Kenosis of the Spirit. In both Kenoses there is a cross to be endured for man's sake, whether the Cross of Calvary, or the spiritual crucifixion of God in fellowship with such men as we are—for we still crucify God by our sins. John

Masefield makes the Quaker evangelist say to the drunkard-hero of his poem, 'The Everlasting Mercy':—

> 'Saul Kane,' she said, 'when next you drink,
> Do me the gentleness to think
> That every drop of drink accursed
> Makes Christ within you die of thirst,
> That every dirty word you say
> Is one more flint upon His way,
> Another thorn about His head,
> Another mock by where He tread,
> Another nail, another cross,
> All that you are is that Christ's loss.'

Theologically, it is more accurate to say with Horace Bushnell, that the *Spirit* 'hath His Gethsemane within us . . . if the sacrifices of the much-enduring, agonizing spirit were acted before the senses in the manner of the incarnate life of Jesus, he would seem to make the world itself a kind of Calvary from age to age' (*The Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 47).

There is a practical value in this doctrine of the Kenosis of the Spirit, for it enables us to meet the shock of disillusionment. Some readers will remember a picture of Doré's, familiar a generation ago, called 'The Neophyte.' It showed a score or so of monks in the choir of their church, each with his own type of face and character, all of them showing the limitations of their vocation. On the face of the newly admitted monk, the 'neophyte' who gave the picture its title, you saw the first awakening of disillusionment, as he looked round on his future comrades, and began to realize, with the intolerance of youth, the contrast between the real and the ideal. Some of the faces are coarse and brutal, some narrow and fanatical, all are disappointing in some way or other—and this is what the dedicated life means! Most of us have felt some such disillusionment—not the spiritual vanity and self-complacency which is contemptuous of the faults of others and ignorant of its own, but the honest and humble disappointment with the whole order of things in the Kingdom of God. Are Church-members morally any better than those who make no profession? Is conversion more than adolescent emotionalism? Does the Church really count for anything in the betterment of society? Are ecclesiastical politics any less ignoble than politics of other kinds? and so on. Now when these difficulties arise, the middle-aged Christian may shrug his shoulders, and stick to his job, determined to make the best of things. But the young and enthusiastic disciple often finds the shock too much for him, and turns away from it all in disgust or despair.

At such a time, the doctrine of the Kenosis of the Spirit serves to remind us that God does not wait until man is perfect before making him in some way a partaker of the Divine nature. Just as it is true that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, so is it true that while we are very unworthy Christians the sanctifying Spirit lives within us. In both ways the love of God is commended to us. The spiritual life of man, like the moral, is essentially the subtle interweaving of two elements not yet adjusted to each other. Our moral problems are largely made by the fact that it is the warp of the body into which the shuttle of the soul must weave the weft of its higher nature. Christian life lifts the moral problems to a new level of meaning, and makes us yet more conscious of dependence on something higher than ourselves for any success. 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Within the individual life, this is exhibited in the seventh chapter of Romans, or in Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter.' But the same conflict of body and soul is seen in our social relations, economic, international, and ecclesiastical. Even that New Testament Church which elicited some of the Apostle Paul's most deeply spiritual utterances was the Church that desired to retain within its fellowship a man guilty of incest. This does not mean that we are to be content with things as they are, or comfort ourselves with the thought that things are no worse than they have been. But it throws us back on the faith that the help man needs in living the highest life is really given to him, in spite of his obvious failures, given by the Personal Presence of God, and on the recognition that it is given as part of his own real life, *with all its limiting conditions*. If we had been living in the palmy days of Puritan theology, we might have expressed the first part of this truth in John Owen's words: 'There is not any spiritual or saving good from first to last communicated unto us, or that we are from and by the grace of God made partakers of, but it is revealed to us and bestowed on us by the Holy Ghost.' To many men to-day, such language has ceased to be intelligible, and to use it would often be to give a stone for bread. But there is still virtue in the ancient advice, 'Come and see,'

when those who give it have won the right to give it. The reading of the Bible, and of all books that reflect its light, the fellowship of believers, the sacramental communion of the Church—these and other familiar means of grace have not yet lost their virtue. But many seek some token of the Spirit's presence more impressive than the quiet and steady growth in grace on which Paul laid such emphasis. Ministers have not yet adequately taught their people what Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy rightly calls 'one of Paul's most splendid achievements in the life of the Early Church, the transformation of the conception of the Spirit as a fitful energy, accompanied by extraordinary manifestations, into that of an abiding, inspiring power, which controls conduct in the interest of love.' How scornful, how indignant, the Apostle would have been against some of the trivialities which men often seek as the necessary support of their faith! 'Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach a Messiah crucified' (1 Co $1^{22f.}$). When so fine a saint as Stephen Grellet speaks of his early fellowship with God, he emphasizes the quiet continuity of it. When at evening he came silently and solemnly into the Lord's presence for self-examination, he says, 'My inquiry was not so much whether I had retired from the world to wait upon God, as whether I had retired from God's presence to harbour worldly thoughts.' That is the hall-mark of a Pauline Christian, a man 'in Christ.' Such continuity of leading does not preclude the more intense and even dramatic realization of the presence of God. It is Grellet himself who tells us of his conversion that 'one evening as I was walking in the fields, alone, my mind being under no kind of religious concern, nor in the least excited by any thing I had heard or thought of, I was suddenly arrested by what seemed to be an awful voice proclaiming the words, "Eternity! eternity! eternity!"'

The example just given will serve also to illustrate the second part of the truth just stated, that the spiritual presence of God is manifested as part of our own life, in terms adapted to our need. The conversion of Grellet, like every genuine conversion, is closely inter-related with his temperament and environment. The Spirit speaks our language—just as Jesus spoke Aramaic. There could be no spiritual communication in a vacuum. There is always some medium, through which the rays of white light as they fall suffer some distortion, that they may spread out into the colours of our human life. The message of the encompassing and indwelling Spirit may come in the lowest of whispers, the faintest touch of persuasion, yet it is a whisper to *our* ears, it is a touch upon *our* mind, with all its mental habits of interpretation. To realize that aspect of the Kenosis is to be delivered from the fanaticism and superstition which have so often haunted the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We are taught humility, since absolute truth, as Lessing reminded us, is for ever beyond mortal grasp. Rufus Jones has well expressed it by saying that there is not any supernatural click that lets us know infallibly the Spirit's testimony. There is an absolute Truth, and it surely belongs to the Spirit of Truth; but all truth in our experience of it is truth relative, relative to us and to our environment, and to our stage of development. We show our childish folly, indeed our unworthiness, if we throw away the portion of truth given us by the Spirit because it is not final or undiluted, but is only such as we can receive. We ought rather to glory that there is no finality in human experience of truth, that truth is always bigger than our horizon can take in. What holds for truth, holds for beauty and for goodness, for the whole life of the Spirit, for all that has its home in God. He must empty Himself, if we are to know Him at all; He must stoop to our intellectual and moral state, as the prophet says He stooped to the child Israel, teaching him to walk, carrying him in His arms when he was tired with trying.

The Divine acceptance of human limitations is not to be confined to 'covenanted' ways, or even within the borders of the Christian faith. The Old Testament reminds us that the Spirit of God was the life of the world from the very beginning, and that the ways of God are often unconventional and surprising. The Holy Spirit, *i.e.* the Spirit of God working through the personality of our Lord Jesus Christ, claims a unique and supreme place in history and experience. But there are testimonies to a wider activity, constantly emerging in literature and in life. 'The truths of life,' as Gissing has said, 'are not discovered by us. At moments unforeseen some gracious influence descends upon the soul, touching it to an emotion which, we know not how, the mind transmutes into thought.' Still more, perhaps, is that unseen Presence manifest, where the mind does not yield so readily. In R. L. Stevenson's words: 'To any man there may

come a consciousness that there blows, through all the articulations of his body, the wind of a spirit not wholly his; that his mind rebels: that another girds him and carries him whither he would not.' The clearest example of this Divine compulsion is in the sense of duty, as may be seen in the prophetic consciousness of Jeremiah. The conscience of man, as the ethical religions have usually been led to recognize, is the present tribunal of God. But Paul, who teaches this so emphatically in the opening chapters of Romans, also teaches that the ethical consciousness is the supreme field of the Spirit's activity. An adequate philosophy of ethics can explain the sense of duty in all men, whether they know it or not, by nothing less than the ultimate pressure of the Divine Spirit upon our own. But we must go farther back. Prior to the specific operations of the Spirit of God through the personality of Jesus Christ, prior even to the moral life of the race, there is the great fundamental work of the Spirit of God in constituting us spirits at all. 'Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created.' Here is the first great inclusive Kenosis of the Spirit, universal as the race itself. Here is God, who fashioned man's body as from the dust of the earth, in the fulness of evolutionary time breathing His Spirit into man. Here is the cardinal act of the Infinite accepting the limitations of the finite, from which all else flows. But the Kenosis of Creation, in the sense of a continual outgoing of the Spirit of God through the long ages of evolutionary development, has certain aspects of a grave and perplexing character, which no honest thinker can ignore. Let Dostoevsky raise them for us. In 'The Brothers Karamazov,' there is a description of brutal cruelty to a helpless child, followed by this challenge to theistic faith: 'Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that babe beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?' There is a double problem there—the suffering of the innocent and the sin of the torturer. Paul apparently thought that suffering came into the world by sin. 'We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves' (Ro $8^{22f.}$). It is not so easy for us to explain all suffering as ultimately due to sin. To our eyes, suffering often seems to be the inevitable cost of progress, if not also its inevitable condition. We can see that our social solidarity means that the sin of one man may bring suffering on another who is innocent, but it is the individual injustice of this that strikes us most. It does not seem enough to speak with Paul of travail-pains, and await the issue of the world's birth-pangs in a new order. We have had to wait nearly nineteen centuries longer than he expected, and though, as Samuel Rutherford said, 'It is not for us to set an hour-glass to the Creator of time,' yet the problem here is not so much one of time as of the essential nature of things. Men are not to be put off to-day with the promise that the end shall justify the means. Their question is rather, 'Is the world, taken in cross-section, a just world, or a world that lends itself to the Christian interpretation of it?' Not every wronged man can keep his faith in God intact like Peter Vaux, who suffered twenty-three years of imprisonment as a New Caledonian convict until his death in 1875, whose unjust conviction was not annulled until twenty-two years after his death. 'O God of infinite wisdom,' he wrote, 'what is Thy secret purpose? I see the things I have worshipped condemned. Invincible Right, eternal Justice, sublime Truth, the love of one's fellow-men, Devotion, Unselfishness, Public Spirit, here below all these are crimes! O Lord, my weak reason cannot compass the vastness of Thy wisdom. Thy will be done.' So his epitaph stands on that New Caledonian grave: 'Here lies Vaux; he has gone to ask justice of God' (H. B. Irving, *Last Studies in Criminology*, pp. 221, 277). But what of men without that village schoolmaster's patriotism and courage?

If, as we Christians believe, the Spirit of God continues to sustain and indwell a world that so contradicts His nature, we are faced by a Kenosis much more subtle and wonderful than that of the creation of finite spirits. It is for us an ultimate fact, beyond our explanation. There is certainly no easy or formal solution to the problem of the suffering of the innocent, any more than that there is to the great mystery of sin. But sometimes we are helped in our difficulties simply by bringing two of them together, as when the blind man carries the lame man on his shoulders, to be

eyes for both. The chief object of this article is to emphasize the continuity of the Divine activity from the Incarnation onwards—exactly the truth which those who hold a 'high' doctrine of the sacraments urge in other applications. The result is that we may interpret the Incarnation in the light of the Spirit's work, and the Spirit's work in the light of the Incarnation. Thus approached, the difficulties that attach to any kind of theodicy are seen to run back to the Cross. There is the same suffering innocence, the same apparent injustice and defeat. All that we want to say by way of arraigning the Universe may be said at the foot of the Cross of Christ. But if it is said there, there is something else to be said, something about the redemption of the world and the power of God unto salvation, something about a God who does not stand aloof, could not so stand, being God, but must enter the world to share our sorrow and bear our sin. *But that is what He is doing all the time by the Kenosis of the Spirit.* It is present experience, not simply ancient history, that, however deep the mystery of sin and suffering, God is in it, and God shares its burden. And is it not present experience that as the Cross shows the great miracle of transformation from shame to glory, so the Spirit continues to transform the so-called 'facts' of experience? For, as Wordsworth said, the highest dower of our human nature is the power of Spirit to transform the meaning of things. Perhaps the last word about many of our problems will be this transforming power of Spirit, exercised not fitfully and weakly by ourselves, but steadily and triumphantly by God. He humbles Himself, now as then, that He may transform from within, not tyrannize from without.

In another way also, the bringing together of the two *kenoses* is suggestive. We may answer the question, 'What is the purpose of the Kenosis of the Spirit?' by asking another, 'What is the purpose of the Kenosis of the Son?' In the manifestation of God in the flesh, in the historic Person and Work of Jesus Christ, there is the presentation to men of clear issues *in terms of intrinsic value.* The eternal is manifest amid the temporal, as the Fourth Gospel brings out so forcibly. 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God, . . . took a towel, and girded Himself' (Jn $13^{3f.}$). There God is seen, manifested in the dignity of service; but to the eye that cannot penetrate the disguise, there is no dignity. One great lesson of the Incarnation is that God wants to be loved for His own sake. He empties Himself of all that might compel allegiance, and comes to man on man's own level, saying, 'Do you recognize Me? will you follow Me, as one of yourselves?' Thus, one aspect of the Kenosis is the putting off of all but the essentials of the Divine character—sacrificial love, holy pity, moral compassion, the redemptive purpose. The towel, and all it means, is first a disguise, and then a symbol of what God is. Apply that to the continued Kenosis of the Spirit. How hard it is, as we have just been thinking, to recognize the indwelling of God in many of our fellow-Christians, in the great world about us, indeed in our own hearts most of all! We are always instinctively asking for the demonstration of the divinity and power of God by some external means that will save us from the responsibility of moral choice. Within our own hearts, we expect a revelation of duty that will occasion no perplexity, an illumination of truth that will call for no struggle of search, a holy peace that needs no constant guarding. In the lives of men around us we look for the dramatic and overwhelming vindication of God, in some way that men cannot deny, and cannot explain away. We expect God to come always with a blast of trumpets to herald His approach. But the Kenosis of the Spirit means something very different. The signs of God's presence are intermingled with many other things. We walk with a stranger on the road to truth, and all the evidence of identity we have is the heart that burns within us. We know the clash of duties, and have to choose with frequent hesitation that which seems to be the right road, in the hope that it may be God's. We discover that the fellowship of the Church, where we expected to find His glory most clearly revealed, is a very imperfect thing after all, whilst we are sometimes left asking whether its undoubted good is human only, and not Divine. So it is with every realm of God's presence, every token of His activity. What does all this mean, in the light of the Kenosis of Galilee and Judæa, but that God says in effect, 'I am here to be known for Myself, to those who will to know Me. If they cannot recognize Me, penetrating beneath every disguise, they may not call themselves My friends'? These then are the really decisive challenges and tests of life. To fail here is to commit the unpardonable sin—if this be our last word—the sin

against the Holy Spirit, which consists in not knowing the intrinsically good, by the evidence of its own nature. God so breathes His Spirit into the mystery of life, that the life itself becomes its own evidence. That is the soul of things, and all else is the body, useful and necessary for a season, but not of the essentials. As we face the moral conventions of the world, we are to discern what is moral and what is conventional, and how far the morality itself is a morality of the Holy Spirit. As we make or listen to the evangelical appeal, we are to remember that the only orthodoxy worth seeking or having is that which brings God, as we have known Him in Christ through the Holy Spirit, into the hearts of men. As we take our part in social relationship, we are to discriminate between that which is of the body and that which is of the soul, married indissolubly as they are in our present experience. Thus does the Kenosis of the Spirit bring before us the real issues of eternal life, in their present entanglement with the transient forms of time. So, through all the generations, men are brought face to face with God as Spirit still manifest in human ways, still disguised, still challenging us with His sacrificial love, and appealing to us through His lowliness.

Literature.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

AMONG the monuments to the Theological Scholarship of the English-speaking world for which we are indebted to Messrs. T. & T. Clark, the 'International Critical Commentary' takes a very high place. With the publication of Dr. Moffatt's *Hebrews* (14s.) and Dr. Lock's *Pastoral Epistles*, this enterprise, so far as the New Testament is concerned, comes within measurable distance of the end of its long and honourable history ('Acts' and the 'Fourth Gospel' are still awaited). We will look at Dr. Moffatt's volume first.

The reader who is ignorant of the literary ancestry of the words and ideas of the document is at a greater disadvantage in Hebrews than in almost any other New Testament book. In his method of Scripture proof, for example, and in his conception of the 'two worlds,' the shadowy, phenomenal, and the perfect, real, world, the writer is no Melchizedek 'without genealogy,' but is dependent on his literary environment. Philo had spoken metaphorically of the Logos as high-priest. The Enochic Son of Man, like the Jesus of Hebrews, had to be in some sense 'Man' 'in order to help men,' and had to be 'transcendent in order to be a deliverer or redeemer.' Hence Dr. Moffatt, while he does not undervalue the poetical or religious originality of the writer 'to the Hebrews,' recognizes that it is a very important part of his work to illustrate the vocabulary and the thoughts of the Epistle from other writings, Christian, Jewish, and 'pagan.' This he does with a thoroughness which will give his commentary an assured place for a long time to come.

Dr. Moffatt impresses hardly less with the conviction his judgments carry than with the abundance of the materials with which he supplies us for forming judgments of our own. He devotes very little space to the vexed question of authorship, recognizing that, so far as we are concerned, the Epistle is and is likely to remain anonymous. Whoever the recipients were, they were in no sense 'Hebrews' nor did the author himself know any Hebrew. The readers were tempted to fall back, not into Judaism but into irreligion; nor were they, as has been recently suggested, a body of 'teachers' in some local Church.

As a single illustration of Dr. Moffatt's method, take the word ὑπόστασις (11[1]), where he quotes and supports the interpretation of Ménégoz ('une assurance certaine') and of Tyndale, as against, on the one hand, Chrysostom ('faith gives substance to unseen hopes') and, on the other hand, a suggestion of Moulton, from the papyri, that 'hypostasis' means 'title-deeds.' Whether he is discussing the rhythmical cadences of the style, the impossibility of a second repentance, the author's ignorance of the sacrificial system as actually practised, or the 'shadow' theory of the nature of earthly things, everywhere Dr. Moffatt