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Divine Kenotic Creativity – The Divine Agency behind Natural Processes

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Abstract: Understanding creation as divine kenosis, which has become rather widespread since the last century, may emphasize the strong connection between the theology of creation and the key Christian doctrine of the Incarnation while contributing to the dialogue between theology and science. At the same time, this theological project requires a thorough rethinking of divine action in order to avoid representing divine agency and natural causality as competitive factors and to affirm divine kenosis as the definitive trait of God without compromising divine freedom. To this end, the concept of "divine kenotic creativity" is suggested and discussed in this paper.

Keywords: divine kenosis in nature; theology of creation; natural theology; compatibilism; God and time; divine freedom; Incarnation; theodicy; eschatology

Introduction

The concept of divine kenotic creativity (DKC), which is to be discussed in this paper, is a particular interpretation of the kenotic creation theology (KCT). The latter may be defined as an "application of kenotic ideas … beyond a strictly christological focus to include other aspects of God's relationship with creation" (Polkinghorne 2001, 92). In other words, the KCT claims that the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, whose life was marked by self-humiliation and sacrificial death, is not the unique occasion of divine kenosis. On the contrary, divine self-abasement is an inherent aspect of how God creates and sustains the world.

The KCT is rather a spectrum of ideas than a uniform system; but it's possible to demonstrate that some versions of it have been imbued with an idea of divine withdrawal, which even borders on divine absenteeism: God retreats from a certain space to make room for natural processes and human action. "A world which is not God exists alongside of Him. This, however, means that God does not wish to occupy the whole of space Himself, but that He wills to make room for other forms of existence" (Brunner 1952, 20). Divine retreat may be interpreted as divine contraction, "God's withdrawal into himself": "in order to create something 'outside' himself, the infinite God must have made room for this finitude beforehand, 'in' himself" (Moltmann 1993b, 109). The concepts of divine retreat and contraction are obviously premised on understanding divine agency and natural causality as competitive factors: either God would act or natural processes would unfold.

These aspects of some kenotic theologies – namely, the "questionable spatial metaphor" and "also questionable commitment to incompatibilism" – were criticized by Christopher Southgate (2008, 58). The interpretation of kenosis as divine withdrawal from the world was also rejected by N.H. Gregersen (2013b, 465), whose views will be discussed later in greater detail. David S. Robinson (2023) claims that the KCT would gain from a dialogue with the more traditional compatibilist perspective – natural events have natural causes, but natural causality is always grounded in the concurring divine action.

In line with these criticisms, I would like to propose the concept of DKC as a compatibilist interpretation of divine kenosis in nature and to demonstrate how this version of the KCT contributes both to the dialogue between theology and science and to Christian systematic theology.

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Every theology that ascribes any kind of self-abasement to Godself has to struggle with the traditional notions of divine impassibility and immutability. But if the latter have to go, how could one retain the even more basic concept of divine freedom? This issue will also be discussed here.

The paper is organized as follows: the first section presents the basic terms that define the DKC concept. In the second section, the possibility of contemplating divine action through the lens of natural theology is discussed. The third section dwells on the temporal dimension of DKC. The fourth section aims to put DKC into the wider Trinitarian and Incarnational context. And the last, fifth section deals with some implications of DKC for Christian dogmatics and ethics.

1. Divine Kenosis in Nature: The Basic Terms

The existence of natural regularities, which are habitually called laws of nature, is apparently the most obvious characteristic of the world since the advent of the modern natural sciences. Scientific formulae describe the autonomous or quasi-autonomous functioning of nature; the very possibility of describing natural processes as if there were no God implies that divine action is somehow concealed from the human eye. But could this concealment be more than a feature of our optics? Could it be the characteristic of divine agency itself?

Wolfhart Pannenberg, who was not in the kenotic creation camp but approached it pretty close at times, has clearly supported the latter hypothesis: "If the Creator willed a world of finite creatures and their independence, then he … had to accept the concealment of his own deity in his creation, its covering over and questioning by the independence of his creatures" (Pannenberg 1994, 173).

The concealment hypothesis doesn't necessarily imply any kind of divine retreat from the world. Suppose that Augustine was right – even after the initial creation, divine support remains indispensable for every existing thing at every moment of time: "quae virtus ab eis quae creata sunt regendis, si aliquando cessaret, simul et illorum cessaret species, omnisque natura concideret" (Augustine 1845, 304; if this strength, which rules the created things, ceased sometime, the created species would immediately cease and the entire nature would collapse).

Instead of withdrawing from the world, the incessant divine action may indeed be the power that ensures the continuity and constant effectiveness of natural laws. To this end, it may humiliate itself by restricting its own freedom and confining itself to the role of natural interactions' source.

Divine kenosis in nature may be therefore interpreted as divine action restraining its own freedom (without restricting its own presence in the created world by any spatial or temporal limits). Inasmuch as divine action restrains itself in order to create and sustain the world, it may be named divine kenotic creativity (DKC).

There is an obvious connection between divine self-restraint and divine self-concealment: the former explains how the latter is enacted. The divine action that keeps itself within the limits of natural regularities becomes practically indistinguishable from the autonomous functioning of nature.

2. Divine Action vs. Ontological Naturalism – Is There Room for Natural Theology?

If divine action is practically indistinguishable from the autonomously existing nature, why should anyone stick to the former concept? Isn't it demonstrated to be completely superfluous? Certainly, this is the question of a non-believer. Someone would say that non-believer's stance shouldn't be taken into account while doing Christian theology because the latter activity presupposes a Christian belief. But non-believer's stance is not a totally alien disposition to a Christian who is immersed in the secular culture of today. On the contrary, this stance is always a possibility that looms on one's mental horizon; having been rejected, it still hovers around and has to be engaged with. Nowadays, no Christian theology makes much sense unless it is also a Christian apologetics.

Is it possible to discern any footprint of divine action, however restrained, in nature itself? This question invokes the classical but controversial tradition of natural theology. Perhaps, it was Jürgen Moltmann who expressed the widespread Barthian and post-Barthian repudiation of natural theology in the most radical form. The author of *The Crucified God* has famously opined that the

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modern European *protest atheism* was partially justified insofar as the utter wickedness of the world doomed any attempt to infer the existence of the benevolent Creator from the observable and comprehensible nature or history (Moltmann 1993a, 220-21). Having completely rejected natural theology, he insisted that only the eschatological hope of the final liberation and consummation lends validity to the very notion of the gracious God (Moltmann 1993a, 255).

Ironically, it is the impossibility to empirically prove the validity of the eschatological hope that is the soundest argument against natural theology. Obviously, no conjecture about the future can be empirically checked in the here and now. Christian faith expects to attain to the fullest vision of God only beyond this world order (1 Corinthians 13:12). Hence, Christian theology doesn't pretend to empirically prove all its claims while the history of the world continues.

Nonetheless, if the world, even in its current shape, didn't reflect divine goodness in any way at all, the eschatological hope would not only lack a decisive empirical proof – it would rather be a hope against hope, an isolated and hopelessly self-referential phenomenon without any support but its own stubbornness.

Thus, Christian theology may well look for divine footprint in nature (Romans 1:20) and seek to discover analogies or even a certain congruence between the things that can be discerned now and the things that the faith awaits with hope (Romans 8:24). How can one discern divine footprint in nature despite the self-restraining and self-concealing character of divine action? How can one affirm divine creative action as the founding principle of nature without denying the entire body of scientific knowledge?

In search of a solution, theologians and theistic philosophers have often resorted to the Fine Tuning Argument (FTA) that may be formulated as follows: "The inhabitability of our universe depends on the precise adjustment of what seem to be arbitrary, contingent features. Had the boundary conditions in the initial seconds of the big bang, and the values of various fundamental constants differed ever so slightly we would not have had anything like a stable universe in which life could evolve" (White 2000, 260). This argument has provoked an extended and thoughtful discussion; nonetheless, the FTA in its classic form won't be analyzed here because, although the DKC concept also addresses the problem of nature's initial conditions, it doesn't depend on the Universe being fine-tuned to produce life and reason.

The DKC concept won't be undermined even by corroboration of the multiverse hypothesis, which is often counterposed against the idea of fine tuning. As Emily Qureshi-Hurst has argued (2021), the metaphysical criticisms of the multiverse hypothesis may indeed be rather unconvincing. But to be a scientific theory, the multiverse hypothesis has to propose a natural "mechanism" that ensures multiple universes' emergence. It's crucially important to note that multiple universes' generation is a specific set of events. And to ensure a specific set of outcomes, a generating "mechanism" must be endowed with some specific characteristics.

Even a scientist who suggests universes' emergence out of nothing can't help referencing, at least implicitly, a certain physical reality as the framework of these events. For instance, to describe the emergent universes quantum mechanically, by wave function (Vilenkin 1982, Hartle and Hawking 1983), means to tacitly suppose that the primordial physical reality is a quantum field. Is the quantum field a kind of natural order – that is, a natural reality endowed with some specific characteristics? Obviously, it is. Without these characteristics, the quantum field could be neither described by any scientific formulae nor cited as an explanation of any natural phenomena that it presumably generates.

Any other scientific theory of the most fundamental level of nature would inevitably proceed in a similar vein: it must suggest that the most fundamental level of nature generating the rest of natural phenomena is endowed with some specific characteristics. Otherwise, this theory would fail to explain any natural phenomena that are more definite than "anything whatsoever."

This reasoning, however, entails an inherent paradox. By definition, the most fundamental level of nature, whether it be the quantum field or anything else, can't be generated by any underlying factors. Therefore, it must be the primordial order that has taken a definite shape due to its own, independent self-determination.

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The only conceivable way to sidestep this conclusion is to suppose that nature is an infinite web of causes without any level of it being the most fundamental. But the infinite web of causal relations wouldn't be a formless "something" without any distinguishable traits; on the contrary, it would be quite a peculiar order. Furthermore, the web that has never originated couldn't have any causes. So, it would also be a primordial order in question: a framework of nature without causes but with a definite shape.

Thus, there is a perfectly sound reason to presume that primordial order shaped by its own, independent self-determination is the basic ontological structure of the world. This conclusion is not premised on any religious beliefs. Even a proponent of ontological naturalism should accept it.

Certainly, the term "self-determination" doesn't need to be understood anthropomorphically at this moment. Nevertheless, one may safely note that any "self-determination" is always a "self-limitation" – because to determine a specific order means to simultaneously refuse any other possibilities. And a Christian theologian may notice that the internal dynamics of the independent but self-restricting reality reminds of the intra-Trinitarian relationship, whereas self-restraint as the basis of cosmic development hints at the creative role of the Logos of God.

These analogies will be further explored and clarified below. And the first aspect to address is the relation of the independent self-determination, which is the ground of the world, to time.

3. A Glance at the Problem of Time

Some proponents of the KCT have claimed that the voluntary self-limitation of divine omniscience might be considered a significant aspect of divine kenosis. According to this opinion, God has renounced the knowledge of the future in order to give freedom to creatures: "God does not know everything in advance because he does not will to know everything in advance. He waits for the response of those he has created, and lets their future come" (Moltmann 2001, 148).

The idea of God renouncing the knowledge of the future has also been discussed by John Polkinghorne (2001, 103-4) in the same collection. "The future does not yet exist and this leads to the belief that even God does not yet know it. In other words, creation has involved a kenosis of divine omniscience. God knows all that can be known, and so possesses a current omniscience, but the divine engagement with the reality of time implies that God does not yet know all that will eventually be knowable, and so does not possess an absolute omniscience."

Whether divine omniscience is somewhat self-limited or not, this particular statement of Polkinghorne is rather problematic. It's obvious that the future does not yet exist for humans. But stating that it does not yet exist for God, one implies that God has renounced eternity and is present only at some particular time.

It's worth noting that the renowned physicist turned theologian has nonetheless acknowledged that the Augustinian vision of God's relation to time is reinforced by the modern scientific understanding of space-time. "Since Augustine, theologians have understood the created nature of time, so that the universe came into being *cum tempore*, not *in tempore*. The modern scientific insights of general relativity, linking together space, time, and matter, have given endorsement to this view, some fifteen centuries after Augustine" (Polkinghorne 2001, 102).

Here Polkinghorne is explicitly pointing at Einstein's general theory of relativity, which demonstrated the interdependence between the geometry of a space-time and the characteristics of energy and momentum inside this space-time. It means that space and time are nothing else but the dimensions of the world. There is no space beyond the world and no time before or after it.

The nature of time *per se* is beyond consideration in this paper. But some clarifications need to be made. The term "time" is employed here in order to refer to the time that can be noticed and measured in the world wherein we exist – not to a speculative idea of a "dead time" that could allegedly exist before the world's beginning (Mullins 2014, 166).

Time is a dimension of natural order. But is it universally indispensable? Or does it belong only in some particular realms of nature, such as the macro-world (Qureshi-Hurst and Pearson 2020)? That's up to scientists to consider. Suppose, however, that time is a dimension of the primordial natural order discussed in the previous section. Even in this case, the primordial self-determination

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that establishes this order must logically precede all its aspects, time included. In other words, this self-determination is what shapes time itself.

Thus, it is atemporal in the same sense as the creative Word of God is atemporal according to the aforementioned Augustinian vision. This Word is nobody else but the Son of God, who is one with the Father (John 10:30): "Verbum Dei Deus apud Deum, Filius unicus Dei, Patri coaeternus est: quamvis Deo hoc in aeterno Verbo dicente creatura temporalis facta sit" (Augustine 1845, 248; the Word of God is God with God, the only Son of God, coeternal with the Father, although temporal creation is produced by God saying it in the eternal Word).

The glance at the problem of time reinforces the hypothesis that was put forward in the previous section; now it can be restated in greater detail.

One may rationally demonstrate that primordial self-determination is the ground of the world. It is absolutely independent of anything – but is restraining itself. It doesn't belong to any particular time but is the atemporal cause underlying the entire natural order with all its dimensions, spatial and temporal. Hence, this very self-determination is akin to the central concept of Christian faith: the eternal Word (Logos) of God, alias the Son of God, who is God himself, through whom the world has been created, and who embraces the past, the present, and the future (Revelation 1:8).

But is it theologically appropriate to make the next step – to suggest that the Word of God coincides with the rationally conceivable self-determination that is the ground of the world?

4. DKC in the Trinitarian and Incarnational Context

The suggestion made at the end of the previous section has much in common with N.H. Gregersen's understanding of the Logos of God as "the generative matrix of all that was, is, and will be … divine Pattern that expresses itself in the multiple forms and structures of the universe" (Gregersen 2013a, 406). At the same time, there is an essential difference between Gregersen's vision and the DKC concept elaborated in this paper.

N.H. Gregersen proposes a multi-level model of divine action in nature. With regard to the most fundamental level of nature, he doesn't presume any difference between divine action and natural events: "from the perspective of creation theology, the ceaseless productivity of quantum events cannot be anything else than expressions of divine creativity …I hereby subscribe to a bottom-level compatibilism between divine agency and natural events. At the deepest cosmological level, divine action and quantum events fully coincide" (Gregersen 2013a, 400).

The bottom level is, obviously, not the only one in nature. Complex structures arise and develop in the Universe; these processes, especially biological evolution and "the emergence of autopoietic systems, which operate in accordance with their own inner structures and priorities (think of immune systems, brains, or language systems)", mean that the "new levels of freedom are launched ... God's ceaseless and determining creativity thus ends up producing freedom over time in the context of higher-order systems" (Gregersen 2013a, 401). It is only at this level that Gregersen introduces the concept of divine kenosis in nature: "there is here no conflict between God's all-determining creativity and creaturely freedom, since the former gives room to the latter … On this model, there is no contrast between divine agency and creaturely freedom, since the former conditions and facilitates the latter. Also, quantum definiteness and a kenotic view of creation are not two conflicting views, but operate at two different levels" (Gregersen 2013a, 402).

The DKC concept elaborated here differs from Gregersen's model since the former discerns divine kenosis under the bottom level of nature as well. Kenosis is not "attached" to divine creativity, but the latter is always kenotic. The prominent Danish theologian seems to overlook that complex structures are not the first natural phenomena to operate according to their own logic. The fundamental interactions give rise to a variety of outcomes – but this variety is not without limits; these interactions can already be described by certain scientific formulae. Even at this level, divine freedom has already restrained itself and given way to the logic of natural regularities. In other words, divine action has voluntarily yielded to this logic in order to produce each and every instant of each and every natural process. Thus, "the divine Pattern", "the generative matrix of all that was, is, and will be" is precisely this yielding.

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Should this yielding really constitute the definition of who the Logos of God is? And is the affirmative answer compatible with the basic tenets of Christian faith? The affirmative answer could imply that creating and sustaining the world via self-abasement were the essential characteristic only of the Logos, that is, of the Son – and not of the Father. In this case, the Son would be essentially different from the Father; thus, the doctrine of the Trinity would crumble. Or – presuming the essential unity of the Father and the Logos – the hypothesis in question could interpret creating and sustaining the world via self-abasement as the essential characteristic of God.

A well-known Trinitarian theologian has clearly summed up the arguments against including God-world relations into the definition of Godself. "If that were the case, then God and the world would be mutually constitutive. The whole thrust of the early development of Christian doctrine goes against such a conclusion, and in this way maintains one of the most decisive insights of the faith of Israel. God is not dependent on the world as the world is dependent on God" (Schwöbel 2014, 22).

To avoid an impasse, one should take a closer look at the very notion of "essence" with regard to God. Every contingent thing (including sentient beings) is shaped by its causes and conditions before it gets an opportunity to produce its own effects. When a contingent being begins to act, it has already got a number of characteristics that define what it is. A being may be less than happy about its essential qualities – still the latter are there, produced by the being's causes and conditions.

In the case of God, this logic doesn't apply. God neither has any causes nor depends on any conditions. But if divine action encountered any divine qualities as given facts, the Godhead would be shaped by some factors other than Godself. Hence, no qualities of God could logically precede divine action.

One might conclude that divine essence is simple – and that it is nothing but divine action itself. Nonetheless, one should take into account that there can be no "action in general." To produce any specific effect, a specific action is required; whereas an action that produced no specific effects at all would be indistinguishable from inaction. In other words, every action is inevitably endowed with some specific characteristics. Therefore, divine essence is not quite simple in the habitual sense of the word. Divine simplicity properly understood means that divine essence is not imposed on God, but is freely chosen and shaped by Godself. It would be wrong to assume any kind of divine being before God makes this choice. God is the "thing" that chooses and shapes itself.

This wording seeks to grasp God's qualitative difference from any created things, to express the absolute freedom of God, and to point at the ultimate incomprehensibility of the Godhead. At the same time, it provides for understanding divine relation to the created world as an essential aspect of the freely chosen divine self without undermining divine freedom. Thus, the Logos of God may well be understood as the eternally and freely chosen divine self-determination to create and sustain the world via self-abasement.

Bruce McCormack's insistence that the Logos of God, the eternal Son, always exists "in anticipation of the incarnation to come" (McCormack 2021, 253) is also quite appropriate. But McCormack is hardly right to downplay (2021, 269-70) the New Testament claims that the world is created and sustained through the same Son (John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2-3). McCormack's position is obviously premised on his understanding of divine creative agency in non-kenotic terms, whereas he proposes the radically kenotic interpretation of the Logos of God with regard to hypostatic union in Christ: "the Logos never acted through or upon Jesus but was united to him solely for the purpose of taking all that Jesus did and experienced and therefore is "up" into his own life" (McCormack 2021, 258).

The DKC concept elaborated in this paper demonstrates that there is no discrepancy between the "humility of the eternal Son" in the context of Incarnation and the creative agency of the same Son. The Son fulfills his creative agency in the same kenotic manner – by yielding to the logic of natural regularities, by relegating divine action to the role of natural interactions' source.

Does it mean that there is no sharp distinction between the creative and sustaining presence of the Logos of God in nature, on the one hand, and the Incarnation of the same Logos in Jesus Christ, on the other hand? This would agree with N.H.Gregersen's concept of "deep incarnation" (Gregersen 2010, 176). But Gregersen himself has provided an argument against such a fusion. "Even if God is at

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work in each and any event, God is not revealed in each and any event. The identity of God as Love can't be said to be revealed in tsunamis, in evolutionary pain, or in the labor and extinction camps of the Third Reich or North Korea" (Gregersen 2013a, 401).

The whole world of creatures exists because of divine yielding that is the generative matrix of creation. And yet the world doesn't represent this yielding by its own performance. But Jesus from Nazareth is the person who does this. Throughout his life, insofar as the New Testament writers describe it, Jesus represents the divine pattern of humble and sacrificial creativity. The whole human personality of Jesus, with all his thoughts, feelings, choices, and so forth, is the expression of God's creative self-abasement. Thus, it is exactly in his capacity as human being that Jesus represents the Logos of God; the kenotic divinity of Jesus is consistently manifest in the Gospel narratives of his life.

Certainly, the humility of Jesus is not humility of outward mannerism; it is, first of all, the openness of Jesus to every kind of people.

Jesus doesn't put forward any preconditions for sharing a meal with sinners, including the tax collectors (Mark 2:15-17; Matthew 11:19; Luke 5:29-32; Luke 15:1-2). He gives a helping hand to outcasts and sinners, to a Gentile woman (Mark 7:25-30), but also to a mainstream religious leader (Mark 5:22-24, 35-42), and to a Roman officer (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10). In the end, Jesus prays for his own torturers and executioners (Luke 23:34).

Jesus's leadership in the nascent Christian community is of the profoundly paradoxical kind. He avoids becoming a political leader (John 6:15) or playing the role of judge (Luke 12:13-14); he discourages other people to judge (Matthew 7:1-5; John 8:3-11). Jesus urges the disciples to abstain from using violence against dissent (Luke 9:52-56) and to serve each other instead of subduing and oppressing each other as people usually do (Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:12-15; cf. 1 Samuel 8:4-7).

In the end, Jesus accepts the unhappy outcome of his life, albeit with a heavy heart, because it is required by his mission. He acquiesces in being arrested, tortured, and murdered; he is sure that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit" (John 12:24 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition). Although the entire life of Jesus is the embodiment of the Logos of God, the Cross is the culmination of the Incarnation. The divine yielding that is the generative matrix of creation has ultimately revealed itself there, on Golgotha, justifying the believers who dare to speak of God in anthropomorphic terms.

This yielding is not a separate creative principle, "a second god alongside of the Father" (McCormack 2021, 270). On the contrary, the Son is the agency of God the Father. It would be equally wrong to suppose that any other action of the Father has ever preceded the Son. If this were the case, the Son wouldn't be an independent self-determination but a secondary, contingent act.

Hence, there is no action of the Father but through the Son (Matthew 28:18, John 3:35), while the Son labors for the sake of the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Divine power is the common power of the Father and the Son (Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6), their common "breath", the Spirit of God (Pannenberg 1994, 78). Thus, the Trinitarian relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is the atemporal structure underlying every divine act *ad extra*, in the created world.

To say that God chooses to be the Trinitarian relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is the same as to say that God chooses to be Love. The unwavering constancy of God, which is emphasized across the Bible, can be perfectly explained by the fact that God is Love (1 John 4:8), without any tacit or explicit reference to any kind of necessity. God is always free to change at will; but Love doesn't want to ever cease.

5. The Implications of DKC for Christian Dogmatics and Ethics

It has been already demonstrated how the DKC concept clarifies general revelation – that is, divine footprint in the created nature. But it may also be employed to outline the boundaries of special revelation.

There are a lot of religious communities with their own cherished scriptures; in today's secularized and diverse milieu, the claims of Christian religious communities about the texts they hold sacred can't be taken for granted. Nevertheless, the New Testament records about Jesus have

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managed, despite the complicated process of their formation (which is the biblical studies' domain), to describe the embodiment of God as the representation of the yielding that is the ground of the world; as a person of humble, creative, and sacrificial love. That gives a sound reason to consider these records the true word of God. Certainly, this reasoning shouldn't stand isolated from a believer's personal experience of being led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:15-16) to affirm the Lordship of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3). But the correspondence between the image of Jesus and the discernible pattern of creation helps to make this experience of faith comprehensible.

As for the other biblical texts, which are not directly describing Jesus Christ, they are fittingly called "the word of God" insofar as they are related to the narratives about Jesus.

In short, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God (Hebrews 1: 1-2), wherefrom all the Scriptures and church bodies get their authority.

The DKC concept may also be employed to discuss the problem of natural and moral evil. Certainly, the attempts to reinforce theodicy with the kenotic arguments are not new. The kenotic manner of divine action means that God provides the incessant and indispensable support for every natural process and every human action but allows these processes and actions to unfold in line with their own inclinations or choices. Therefore, "creatures will behave in accordance with their natures: lions will kill their prey; earthquakes will happen; volcanoes will erupt and rivers flood" (Polkinghorne 2001, 95) – and humans will torment each other and reject God if they choose to do it.

Nevertheless, this observation falls short of a complete theodicy. Surely, this is how God acts; but why does God act in this way? One can suppose that kenotic action is the only or the best possible way to the ultimate good (Southgate 2008, 90). One can even reasonably argue that biological evolution is precisely the process that leads to a great richness of existence presumably wished by the benevolent Creator. But, except for miraculously acquiring omniscience, a human can't decisively prove that a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent Being would not devise any other ways to the same ultimate good.

The Creator may be expected to heal every wound, ultimately proving divine goodness – but it's still a hope that can't be replaced with knowledge as long as history continues. Nevertheless, the eschatological hope can be reinforced with rational arguments, and the KCT may well provide these arguments.

First of all, Christopher Southgate is quite right to emphasize "the proposal that God suffers in the suffering of every creature" (2008, 56). Understanding creation as kenosis implies that the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, who has paid a great price to become a gratuitous self-giving of divine love embracing even the wrongdoers, and even before they repent (Romans 5:5-8), is not an isolated outpouring of divine benevolence, but the epitome of God's consistent manner of action. The believers may be encouraged by an assurance that our God is not a remote cosmic tyrant, but the Creator who suffers the burdensome and turbulent unfolding of the created reality. And it's quite reasonable to hope that the Creator so much engaged with the created world is somehow intent to bring it to a greater good.

Moreover, the DKC concept can provide some natural-theology arguments against interpreting the biblical vision of this greater good – that is, of death being exterminated by the universal resurrection and the whole creation partaking of divine life (1 Corinthians 15: 26-28) – as only a metaphor. The restriction of divine freedom is the generative matrix of this world; but it is a self-restriction. God remains free to abolish or alter the self-imposed constraints, to upend the basic parameters of our world replacing them with something different. Furthermore, divine determination to preserve the laws of nature throughout the history of the Universe doesn't preclude giving a few anticipatory signs that point at the entirely different world order. And the appearances of the resurrected Christ to the first disciples (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) are presumably the brightest of these anticipatory signs.

The last issue to address here is the ethical dimension of the KCT. God invites humans to imitate the kenotic way of action, to participate in divine creative endurance – that is, to learn the humility of Christ (Matthew 11:29), to reflect divine Love, which extends even to the enemies, the ungrateful, and the wicked (Matthew 5:44-45, Luke 6:35), and thus to oppose evil (Romans 12:21).

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Unfortunately, it's a matter of common knowledge that, while formally accepting this call, Christian communities have all too often distorted its substance. And, paradoxically, there is no clear-cut procedure that the well-meaning Christian churches and organizations could implement to securely eradicate their moral failures.

Any organizational effort implies making and enforcing rules, deploying some kind of power to discipline the wrongdoers, and so forth. On the one hand, this is only natural. How would any human organization achieve internal cohesiveness, solve internal conflicts, and overcome a great number of other challenges if not by imposing and enforcing rules? This is practically inevitable for any community consisting of human beings. On the other hand, rules' enforcement (even if it rests on a moral pressure, a threat of exclusion, and so on, without any kind of physical violence) will always imply judging people. And making judgment about any other person is a clear case of moral hazard, an occasion of sin, a powerful incitement to enjoy one's own purported righteousness while trampling on the others (cf. Matthew 7:1-5, John 8:3-11). Thus, expending organizational effort to ensure the correct thoughts, correct speech, and correct behavior of the community members will almost certainly trigger a vicious cycle of hypocritical righteousness, abuse, bullying, despair, and cynicism.

The bottom line is that it's impossible to impose and enforce love and humility. Every time somebody tries, they end up enforcing something entirely different. Perhaps, the humility required of Christian churches and organizations is to remember their own inability to make people righteous. They would do the right thing recalling a crucial distinction between *iustitia passiva* and *iustitia activa*, once highlighted by the Reformation, and applying it in the ecclesiastical context – that is, to themselves. As for the passive righteousness, the Reformer's formula is quite enlightening: "non habemus, sed accipimus, donante eam nobis Deo Patre per Iesum Christum" (Luther 1911, 43; we don't have it but receive it; it is bestowed on us by God the Father through Jesus Christ). A Christian church is passively righteous as long as it remains a space where the written word of the Bible and the Sacraments represent Jesus Christ. But the active righteousness of any Christian community – that is, the righteousness of its individual members, its officials, its assemblies, and so on – is always inchoate and questionable. It grows, here and there, insofar as this or that person gets inspired and reformed by divine call. But these individual transformations are difficult to forecast and easy to overlook. This is characteristic of the divine way of action – it is humble and barely discernible.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has introduced the concept of divine kenotic creativity (DKC). This concept avoids any hint of divine withdrawal from the world; it understands divine kenosis in nature as the self-restraint of divine freedom without any spatial or temporal limitation of divine presence.

It is also argued in this paper that one shouldn't contemplate divine creative action without kenosis and add the latter to the picture at some further stage. On the contrary, divine creative action is inherently kenotic; it is grounded in God's eternally and freely chosen determination to create and sustain the world via self-abasement. This notion is a meeting point between the purely rational knowledge about the world (it may be rationally demonstrated that a certain self-determinate reality is the basic ontological structure of the world) and the biblical vision of the Logos of God – that is, of the second person of the Trinity, the Son, through whom God the Father creates the world, sustains it, and brings it into the communion with Godself.

It is also demonstrated here that making divine relation to the world an essential aspect of the Godhead doesn't compromise divine simplicity and freedom because God is the "thing" that defines itself, freely choosing its own essence.

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