

Reading Vos, I was struck by his diatribe against the exaggerated theological focus on the doctrine of kenosis. These have been the texts of Vos that have induced me to write the following article:

<<On the contrary, however, modern kenosis doctrine, itself pantheistic in origin, has explained the incarnation itself as an extinction or emptying of deity>>.

-Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, trans. Annemie Godbehere et al. vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012-14), 191.

<<The love of Christ.-The love of Christ St. Paul views chiefly as manifested in His Death (2 Cor 5:14f.), or in His life as entered upon and lived with a view to and culminating in His Death (Ph 2:5ff.). The Incarnation is an act of self-kenosis, not in the metaphysical, but in the metaphorical sense (AV 'made himself of no reputation'), hence is described in 2 Cor 8:9 as a 'becoming poor.' It ought to be noticed that the love of Christ, as well as that of the believer, is in the first place a love for God, and after that a love for man. Christ lives unto God, even in the state of glory (Rom 6:10), and gave Himself in the Atonement a sacrifice unto God (Eph 5:2)>>.

-Geerhardus Vos, *The Collected Dictionary Articles of Geerhardus Vos* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013).

It is certainly a mysterious and impressive thing that God-Son became a man. But what for? The real issue is why he became human. The answer is simple: to die on the cross, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. God gave his son to the world, but for what? It was not only as a teacher or as a philosopher, God gave his son as a holy sacrifice. God, says Paul, punished sin in the flesh of the Son. Even greater is the proof that the cross is the center of the gospel when we see it explained by St. Paul: <<First of all, I have taught you the same things that I received: that according to the Scriptures Christ died for our sins; that also according to the Scriptures he was buried, and rose again the third day; and that he appeared to Cephas, and afterward to the twelve>>. The burial and resurrection are necessities that arise from the key point which is the cross. Christ was not buried for our sins, Christ was not resurrected for our sins, but Christ died for our sins.

Everyone knows of Paul's famous pericope about the resurrection: <<If Christ has not been raised from the dead, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die>>. This, far from invalidating what I have previously explained, corroborates it. Resurrection is a necessity, but it is not the center. Christ cannot rise if he has not first died for sins. It is Paul himself who also says: <<I preach Christ and him crucified>>.

As for kenosis, much has been written. Certainly it is necessary to have a theology of Kenosis, since one must somehow explain how God-Son can be man and God at the same time and not be two persons. I am not railing against Christology, the incarnation is important and such an issue must be dealt with. However, as the wise Spanish proverb says: <<when the wise man points to the moon, the fool looks at the wise man's finger>>. The most important thing is not that God-Son became man, the most important is that God-Son became a man of sorrows, experienced in grief, as Isaiah prophesied. That God-Son was to be human is axiomatic, since only humans can die. That God-Son was to be resurrected is axiomatic, since the wages of sin is death and if the blood shed by Christ on the cross for sins cancels guilt, then death must be defeated. Therefore, both incarnation and resurrection are

axiomatic necessities required, the first in order to go to the cross, the latter as a consequence of the efficacy of the cross.

To conclude, attention should be paid to chapter two of Philippians. Joachim Jeremias, without going into technical details, went so far as to assert that the <<kenosis>> was not a statement adjectivizing the incarnation, but the cross. In his view, Philippians 2:7 would have a linguistic parallel with Isaiah 53:12. The putting off or emptying in Philippians would be the pouring out of the life in Isaiah. Jeremiah received strong objections from Bornkamm, among others, as Jeremiah himself explains in his book <<Abba: The Central Message of the New Testament>>. Few authors have pointed to the story of Gethsemane when commenting on the Carmen Christi. However, James F. McGrath gives a few names: <<While it has been rare for scholars commenting specifically on Philippians 2:8 to make reference to the Gethsemane story in that context, there have been exceptions. Alfred Plummer very briefly noted the possibility of a connection, stating in passing when commenting on Philippians 2:8, "The prayers in Gethsemane may be in St. Paul's mind." 10 Markus Bockmuehl also notes that the prayer at Gethsemane provides the "canonical context" of the terminology "unto death" in this verse. 11 Carolyn Osiek devotes slightly more attention to this possibility, and draws a connection at the same time with Hebrews. 12 Joel Marcus likewise makes an important three-way connection between Philippians, Mark, and Hebrews 5:7-10. The latter passage offers a more explicit allusion to the Gethsemane story than Philippians does, in a context that at the same time includes striking thematic and structural similarities to Philippians 2:6-11>>> (Obedient Unto Death: Philippians 2:8, Gethsemane, and the Historical Jesus, Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus).

Whether Jeremiah and co. are right or wrong, there is no reason to fear the loss of an important passage for the doctrine of the incarnation, since the first chapter of John's Gospel is more than sufficient and explicitly clear. The incarnation is a fact and necessity on a par with the resurrection. But the cross should be remembered and maintained as the center of the gospel and climax of the Heilsgeschichte.

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- Martin Luther