# *Part I*

# The Contemplative Matrix

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# Chapter 1

# *KENŌSIS* AND SUBVERSION: ON THE REPRESSION OF 'VULNERABILITY' IN CHRISTIAN FEMINIST WRITING

In an important passage in *Theology and Feminism*, Daphne Hampson tackles the question of christological *kenōsis*, or 'voluntary self-emptying on the part of the second person of the Trinity'.[1] Citing Rosemary Radford Ruether's view that Jesus' self-emptying offers a challenge to patriarchy,[2] she counters with the thought that 'it is far from clear that the theme of *kenōsis* is the way in which monotheism would need to be qualified in order to bring the understanding of God more into line with feminist values'. She goes on:

> That it [*kenōsis*] should have featured prominently in Christian thought is perhaps an indication of the fact that men have understood what the male problem, in thinking in terms of hierarchy and domination, has been. It may well be a model which men need to appropriate and which may helpfully be built into the male understanding of God. *But . . . for women, the theme of self-emptying and self-abnegation is far from helpful as a paradigm.*[3]

What are we to make of Hampson's rejection of *kenōsis* and Ruether's equally staunch – though brief – defence of it? The matter clearly cuts close to the heart of what separates Christian and post-Christian feminism; and hence my focus on it in this essay. For Hampson, female 'autonomy' is a supreme good which kenotic Christology can only undermine, not enhance. In contrast, for me, what rightly distinguishes Christian feminism from various secular versions of it must necessarily lie in this disputed

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[1] D. Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 155.

[2] See R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London, SCM Press, 1983), pp. 137–8.

[3] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, p. 155 (my emphasis).

christological realm: here, if anywhere, Christian feminism has something corrective to offer secular feminism.

It will be the burden of this essay, then, to offer a defence of some version of *kenōsis* as not only compatible with feminism, but vital to a distinctively Christian manifestation of it, a manifestation which does not eschew, but embraces, the spiritual paradoxes of 'losing one's life in order to save it'. But in order to arrive at the point where I can justify such a 'loss' for Christian feminism (an ostensibly implausible move, one might think), I first have to unravel some semantic and historical confusions about the very meaning of *kenōsis*, a word that has had a bewildering number of different evocations in different contexts in the Christian tradition. Indeed it is a misunderstanding on this score which is partly responsible for the divergence between Hampson and Ruether, as we shall see.

The value of this unravelling task will not, I believe, be merely pedantic. For it is central to what I am attempting in this essay to demonstrate that the rhetoric of *kenōsis* has not simply constituted the all-too-familiar exhortation to women to submit to lives of self-destructive subordination; and nor (as Hampson believes) can it be discarded solely as a compensatory reaction to 'the male problem'. The evocations of the term have been much more complex and confusing even than that; just as the Christian tradition is in so many respects complex, confusing and (as I believe), continually creative. Thus by showing briefly in this piece how New Testament, patristic, post-Reformation Lutheran, early twentieth-century British, and contemporary analytic philosophy of religion discourses on *kenōsis* fail to mesh or concur at crucial points (and even use the term in straightforwardly contradictory ways), we shall be able to make some finer distinctions than those in the exchange between Hampson and Ruether about what form of *kenōsis* would be compatible with feminist interests, and what not. We shall also be able to distinguish, without disconnecting, the specifically christological meaning of *kenōsis* from the more broadly spiritual meaning. Moreover, since debates about christological *kenōsis* distil for us the more fundamental philosophical problem of how, normatively, to construe the relationship between the divine and the human *tout court*, it will be instructive to note how gender preconceptions, or gender anxieties, tend to lurk in this discussion. (To this extent Hampson's passing remarks about gender and *kenōsis* are certainly suggestive, and have yet to be applied to the philosophical dimensions of the issue.)

Finally, I shall enquire why themes of 'fragility', 'vulnerability' or 'self-emptying' have been relatively muted in white Christian feminist writing up till now, when secular feminism, and non-white or Black womanist theology have in a variety of ways tackled these themes more directly. I shall end with a suggestion for 'right' *kenōsis* founded on an analysis of the activity of Christian silent prayer (or 'contemplation'[4]), an activity characterized by a rather special form of 'vulnerability' or 'self-effacement'. My aim here is to show how wordless prayer can enable one, paradoxically, to hold vulnerability and personal empowerment *together*, precisely by creating the 'space' in which non-coercive divine power manifests itself, and I take this to be crucial for my understanding of a specifically Christian form of feminism. Or to put it more boldly and autobiographically: if I could not make spiritual and theological sense of this *special* form of power-in-vulnerability (*kenōsis* in one sense to be defined), I would see little point in continuing the tortured battle to bring feminism and Christianity together. In this sense, I am not sure that I want to pick the bones out of the Christic 'fish' before I begin; for it could be that in so doing I had removed the backbone that structures the central mystery of Christian salvation. Our first task, then, will be to turn back to the New Testament in search of Paul's meaning of *kenōsis*. It will be illuminating to discover how little this has to do with Hampson's critique.

## I

The word *kenōsis* does not appear as a noun in the New Testament at all, and the entire debate about 'self-emptying' goes back to an isolated appearance of the verb *kenoō* (I empty) in Philippians 2.7. To choose to cite one English translation over others here is already to beg significant questions of interpretation; but the Revised Standard Version of Philippians 2.5–11 runs:

> [5]Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, [6]who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7]but emptied himself [*heauton ekenōsen*], taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men [*anthrōpōn*, i.e., of humans]. [8]And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. [9]Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every other name, [10]that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the

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[4] It is important to underscore at the outset that I do not use this word in an elitist sense, but rather to denote any (relatively) wordless form of prayer in which discursive thought is reduced to the minimum. For more on this, and its centrality to the essay, see section VI below.

earth, [11]and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Without in any sense committing the 'genetic fallacy' of presuming that the 'original' meaning of this passage is now binding on us, it is nonetheless intriguing to enquire what the 'emptying' here did connote at the outset. The matter is, however, one of the most convoluted (and disputed) in New Testament exegesis. Since Ernst Lohmeyer's influential analysis of the strophic structure of the passage in the late 1920s,[5] commentators have been virtually agreed that the passage was originally used liturgically as a hymn (possibly in either a baptismal or eucharistic setting); and the probability that the passage therefore represents pre-Pauline material taken over by Paul for his own purposes in this letter complexifies the issue of interpretation at the outset. (For we thus already have a double layer of meaning within the text as we have received it.) Waves of fashion in this century's New Testament scholarship have dictated widely divergent readings of Paul's (and his shadowy forebear's) intent. At one extreme there have been the (mainly German) exponents of the 'gnostic redeemer' theory,[6] who argue, under the influence of 'history of religions' analysis, that Paul has taken over, and modified, a soteriological framework from (what are taken to be) pre-Christian gnostic circles, in which the archetypal *Urmensch*, or 'original Man', descends to earth and simulates human existence in order to impart secret saving *gnosis* to his select followers. According to this view, *some* form of divine (or quasi-divine) 'pre-existence' is assumed for the Christ redeemer, and the 'emptying' connotes his appearance on earth. The emphasis, however, is not on the precise metaphysical speculation of later patristic Christology, on Christ's full and substantial divinity (or otherwise), as in the debates surrounding the Council of Nicaea (325); rather, it is on the mythological rhythm of salvific intervention and release. As Käsemann put it, 'Philippians 2 tells us what Christ *did*, not what he *was*.'[7]

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[5] See E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil.* 2, 5–11 (Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1961 (1928)). Lohmeyer was, however, not the first to detect a strophic construction to the passage, and the debate continues on how to divide the *strophēs*: see (for example) J. Jeremias, 'Zu Phil. ii. 7: *heauton ekenōsen*', *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963), pp. 184–8, for a discussion and analysis of this problem, with criticism of earlier solutions.

[6] See R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 74–84, 89–93, for a brief account of this theory as maintained by various members of the Bultmannian school. (Martin's book remains the best general introduction to the exegetical problems of Philippians 2.) M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (London, SCM Press, 1976), esp. pp. 1–2, represents the most impenitent recent reassertion of the view that Philippians 2 is speaking of Christ's pre-existent *divinity*. As such, Hengel's exegesis falls outside the two major contemporary 'types' of interpretation I am here sketching.

At the other end of the spectrum lies a more straightforwardly ethical interpretation of the passage,[8] with no clear implications at all of Christ's pre-existence. Such an interpretation may at first sight seem surprising, even suspiciously artful, accustomed as we are to reading this passage through the lens of later credal orthodoxy: is not the 'emptying' of v. 7 most obviously seen as a reference to the incarnation? But there are a number of reasons why this alternative reading might seem more consistent with earliest Christianity in general, and Pauline theology in particular. First, the notion of substantial pre-existence does not otherwise feature in (proto-) Pauline settings. Second, the crucial preceding participle clause ('though he was in the form of God'), which triggers our train of thought towards pre-existence and incarnation, may in context more appropriately be read as a piece of Adam typology (already a characteristic of Paul's Christology in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15). On this view the 'form of God' is a reference to the creation of the *human* race; Genesis 1.26–7, after all, speaks of God creating 'man' 'in his own image'. So now Christ, as second Adam (also in 'the form of God'), revokes the penalty of Eden by undoing Adam's primal disobedience. Thus, third, the 'thing to be grasped', as the RSV has it (the *harpagmon*, v. 6), becomes quite possibly an allusion to Adam's first sin in making himself 'like God' (Genesis 3.5, 22), again here recapitulated and reversed in Christ's life and example.[9] We are not on this view, then, talking about a set of (pre-existent) divine attributes which could have been held onto by Christ, but instead were relinquished. Rather, the 'grasping' is a form of moral turpitude and arrogance that Jesus avoids right from the start of his ministry. And so, fourth, then, the 'emptying' on this interpretation now denotes not incarnation, but rather the 'servant-like' example set by Jesus' demeanour throughout his life (with possible overtones of the Isaianic 'suffering servant'), an 'empty-ing' which finds its ultimate end in the events of the cross (v. 8). Thus, on this 'ethical' reading, the 'emptying' of v. 7 is *parallel* to the 'humbling' of v. 8;[10] both take place within Jesus' earthly existence, rather than the 'emptying' being a precondition of the earthly life (as on the 'pre-existence' reading).

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[7] E. Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche and Besinnungen: erste Band* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960), p. 70 (cited in Martin, *Carmen Christi*, p. 83).

[8] See (for example) Jeremias, 'Zu Phil. ii.7' (by implication); and more fully in J. A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (London, SCM Press, 1973), pp. 162–6, and J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London, SCM Press, 1980), pp. 114–21. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, pp. 68–74, provides a brief discussion of earlier twentieth-century exponents of this 'ethical example' interpretation.

[9] See Dunn, *Christology*, ch. 4, *passim*, for this line of argument on Adam typology. (The matter is, however, not uncontentious: it is not *clear* from the original Hebrew text of Genesis 2 that being 'equal with God' is deemed to be either a 'snatching' or a 'sin'. I am grateful to Robert Murray, SJ for a number of illuminating discussions on this point.) N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), *passim* (see esp. the chart on p. 81 as résumé), contains an exhaustive survey of the possible meanings of *harpagmos* in this context.

To sketch out these two dominant schools of interpretation of Philippians 2 in broad outline is to give only a crude account of the complexity of the New Testament hermeneutical debates on this passage over recent decades. The two basic views sketched both have remaining problems, and some scholars have argued that it is a false move to force a disjunctive choice between them.[11] Debates continue about the contextual background of the passage: are the allusions mainly to the Hebrew Scriptures, or to gnostic and pagan themes? But one striking point of unanimity in the modern New Testament discussion (amidst all this dissent) has been the virtual ruling out of a 'dogmatic' or 'metaphysical' reading of Paul's interests in this passage. It is not, in other words, a prefigurement of second-century Logos speculation (in the mode of Justin Martyr, for instance), let alone a preview of fourth-century Nicaean orthodoxy (which takes the Son to share all divine characteristics with the Father in advance of the incarnation). Rather, *if* 'pre-existence' (of a sort) is implied here, it is of a 'mythological' or soteriologically oriented kind, as in gnostic redeemer narratives; and it is this *narrative* structure which the Philippians are being asked to enter into, to make their own 'mind' (v. 5).

This ostensibly 'anti-dogmatic' tenor of the New Testament discussion of *kenōsis* contrasts forcibly with discussions of Philippians 2 in other circles, as we shall see, especially the contemporary analytic philosophy of religion writing on the matter (which appears strangely ignorant of the New Testament debates). And yet, despite the conscious preference of many twentieth-century New Testament scholars for existential rather than metaphysical categories, we may, I suggest, nonetheless detect ways in which concern about 'incarnation' and the 'two natures' problem has (more or less covertly) fuelled their concerns and fashions, whether in criticism or redirection of traditional patristic options. To expose this rather buried dimension of the

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[10] So Jeremias, 'Zu Phil. ii.7', p. 187; Dunn, *Christology*, p. 118.

[11] This is the conclusion of Wright's complex argument (*The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 97), which picks up some dimensions of an influential earlier article by C. F. D. Moule ('Further Reflexions on Philippians 2:5–11' in W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 264–76; see esp. pp. 264–5). I treat of Moule's position in some more detail below.

New Testament hermeneutical question will also prove illuminating in relation to our central, feminist concern (though, tellingly, I can find no explicit feminist analysis in the voluminous New Testament secondary literature concerning Philippians 2 itself).

Of the two broad tendencies in New Testament interpretation of Philippians 2 I have described, the first, influenced as it was by 'history of religions' methodology, and thus anxious to locate earliest Christology within a broad stratum of Middle Eastern mythology and ritual practice, explicitly thrust aside what it saw as the metaphysical clamps of later doctrinal 'orthodoxy' in search of a more direct, 'existential' response of faith. This, after all, was the hallmark of Bultmann's Heideggerian theology. As a result, and as we have just seen, even though 'pre-existence' of a 'mythical' form was presumed in the interpretation of Philippians 2, the 'emptying' here was not seen to imply the *divesting* of some clearly defined set of divine characteristics, otherwise uniquely shared with the 'Father'. Rather, if anything, the docetism of the gnostic redeemer mythology still hung over its Pauline reworking: the Christ figure appeared only 'in the *form* of man', feigning human weakness for the purposes of salvific activity. This being the case, we can now see that Daphne Hampson's charge against *kenōsis* with which we opened (as a masculinist ploy, beset by conscience), does not clearly score at all against this form of New Testament interpretation of Philippians 2. That is, precisely because the later 'two natures' gloss on pre-existence has, for theological or ideological reasons, been rejected by this school of thinking from the outset, so too it never considers the kind of compensatory 'emptying' that Hampson is attacking.[12] If anything, the quasi-gnostic redeemer of the pre-Pauline hymn merely pretends to abandon his divine powers, rather than actually doing so.

So Hampson's critique does not really touch this form of New Testament analysis; but even less, significantly, does it bite against the alternative, 'ethical' reading favoured by a different school of New Testament scholarship. For here, if I am right, an even more far-reaching questioning of later Nicene or Chalcedonian 'orthodoxy' may be driving the theological direction taken. If, that is, substantial pre-existence of *no* sort is found in the Pauline text, then there is no clear charter here for later Nicene 'orthodoxy', and no full range of divine characteristics to be abandoned or otherwise.[13] So once again Hampson's criticisms are deflected.

If, on the other hand, another variant of the 'ethical' interpretation is preferred, as suggested by C. F. D. Moule, then more far-reaching metaphysical implications are involved, though not the ones normally associated with Chalcedonian 'orthodoxy'. On this 'ethical' view Jesus' 'emptying' is seen not just as the blueprint for a perfect human moral response, but as revelatory of the 'humility' of the *divine* nature. As Moule puts it: '. . . Jesus displayed the self-giving humility which is the *essence of divinity*'.[14] Moule's interpretation, we note, involves a strange combination of factors. Unlike other interpreters of our 'ethical' type, he appears to take Christ's pre-existence, and certainly his full divinity, as given in the passage; but *like* other 'ethical' readings he finds the 'emptying' not to refer to an effect on either of these, nor to his incarnation, but rather to his humanly 'humble' and 'non-grasping' nature – which, however, he then casts as the distinctively *divine* characteristic. Thus Moule combines a remaining 'orthodox' commitment to pre-existence and incarnation with a significant relocation of the attribute of 'humility'. This (new) metaphysical gloss was one taken up more systematically by Moule's Cambridge colleague, J. A. T. Robinson, and we shall return to consider its coherence a little later. The point to be made for our immediate purposes here is how *complex* is the entanglement of hermeneutical and dogmatic questions where this passage is concerned, even when questions of christological speculation in the patristic mode have ostensibly been abandoned (and that, too, before we get to the subtler issues of gender subtext). What is at stake is nothing less than our fundamental presumptions about divine and human nature, and the possibility, or otherwise, of their complete concurrence. In Moule's artful reworking of the 'ethical' interpretation, we note, Hampson's critique of *kenōsis* is again averted, but this time in yet another (and third) way: Jesus' 'emptying' involves no compensatory loss of 'masculinist' divine powers, because his example shows us that divinity is 'humble' *rather than* 'powerful' (whatever this means). His way to the cross is the revelation of an unchanging, but consistently 'humble', divinity. Thus, Moule's interpretation is somewhat closer to what Ruether seems to mean by *kenōsis* when she asserts that Jesus' message and example represent 'patriarchy's' *kenōsis*: that is (or so I read her), Jesus promoted values quite different from those of *machismo* or worldly power. In his ethical example patriarchy was emptied out (not, we note, Christ himself emptied out).

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[12] The one major exception to this rule would be Hengel, *Son of God*. See n. 6 above.

[13] See again Dunn, *Christology*, pp. 114–21, for the clearest enunciation of these points.

We come away from the New Testament debate, then, with a host of questions, only partially resolved. All commentators (or nearly all) concur that it is an anachronism to see Paul or his source expressing anything like the 'two nature' Christology of later 'orthodoxy'; yet disagreements about the original context, religious genre, and aims of the Christic hymn of Philippians 2 still lead to different (implicit) dogmatic conclusions about the normative relation of divine 'powers' to the human here expressed. Let us consider the range of possibilities we have already generated. Is the christological blueprint of Philippians 2 a matter of: (1) temporarily *relinquishing* divine powers which are Christ's by right (as cosmic redeemer); or (2) *pretending* to relinquish divine powers whilst actually retaining them (as gnostic redeemer); or (3) choosing *never to have* certain (false and worldly) forms of power – forms sometimes wrongly construed as 'divine'; or (4) *revealing* 'divine power' to be intrinsically 'humble' rather than 'grasping'? Of these four alternatives already in play, Hampson would presumably only regard (1) – or possibly also (2) – as falling under her critique of masculinist *kenōsis*; and I have argued that even they, if framed in the terms of the 'history of religions' approach, are less obviously subject to her criticism than if they had been formulated on the presumptions of later patristic categories. For my own part, for the reasons sketched above, I am mo convinced by the third interpretation than the others (at least as far the New Testament debate is concerned), and I shall return to this option again when I regather my systematic conclusions at the end of the essay. Hampson, however, might justifiably here object that she had none of this New Testament complexity in mind when she made her charge. Rather, her target is the much later form of speculative 'kenoticism' devised by early twentieth-century British theologians of privileged backgrounds, exercising their (perhaps guilty) social consciences. In this she is right; but in order to see how we get from the New Testament to these exponents, some interim historical material is worthy of review. Again, as we shall see, ironic results arise from trying to bring different notions of *kenōsis* into consistent focus, especially where a feminist analysis is concerned. But at least we are beginning to see why Hampson and Ruether do not agree: it is because, in all this historical and semantic complexity over *kenōsis*, their views do not even properly *connect*. Ruether is promoting a view of *kenōsis* that Hampson does not seriously consider.

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[14] Moule, 'Further Reflexions', p. 265 (my emphasis).

## II

The patristic exegesis of Philippians 2, and of the term *kenōsis* in particular, makes very different hermeneutical and philosophical presumptions from those of the modern New Testament discussions we have just surveyed. Yet, strangely – as shown in a now-classic coverage of the patristic material by Friedrich Loofs[15] – the range of options presented (from 'ethical' to 'incarnational', with various stopping-points or combinations in between), is uncannily similar to the modern-day alternatives endlessly rejigged by New Testament scholars with (often) very little knowledge of 'pre-critical' exegesis. I do not, however, here want to focus on the 'ethical' (or what Loofs terms the 'Pelagian') variant, which in any case did not ultimately emerge as regnant in the patristic period. Rather, what I wish to underscore is the *irony* of the reversal of presumptions about *kenōsis* between the time of Paul and the triumph of Chalcedonian 'orthodoxy' in the fifth century – an orthodoxy highly influenced by the demanding paradoxes of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444).

Whereas Paul's views on *kenōsis*, as we have seen, were largely non-'speculative', non-'dogmatic', and arguably not even asserting substantial pre-existence at all, the formative christological discussions of the fourth and fifth centuries (in the wake of the hard-won battles over the Council of Nicaea) take Christ's substantial pre-existence and essential divinity *for granted*. The problem then resides in explicating what 'emptying' can *mean* in Philippians 2, assuming now that it is somehow coextensive with the event of incarnation, but granted that characteristics such as omniscience and omnipotence are taken (unquestioningly) to be unchanging aspects of the divine nature.[16] Thus Hilary of Poitiers, in the fourth century, could talk rather daringly – and indeed confusingly – of an 'evacuation of the form of God', whilst yet denying that Christ's divinity had been dislodged in any sense; while Cyril of Alexandria, in the fifth century, went on to make Philippians 2 the narrative focus of his entire Logos Christology, clarifying that the pre-existent divine Logos was – albeit paradoxically – also the personal or 'hypostatic' subject of Christ's human states, but without any impairment or restriction of the divine attributes.[17] For Cyril, then, the word *kenōsis* signified no loss or abnegation, but simply the so-called 'abasements' involved in the taking of flesh. He was finally at a loss how to *explain* how this assumption of flesh could occur without detriment or change to the divine Logos; it led him, for instance, to glory in such famously paradoxical expressions about Christ's passion as 'He suffered unsufferingly'.[18] But he achieved his theological goals by seeing the *kenōsis* of incarnation not as loss, but rather as an addition of human flesh and blood to the abiding and unchanging characteristics of divinity. As he writes: 'The Only begotten Word . . . came down for the sake of our salvation and abased Himself into emptying [*kenōsis*] and was incarnate . . . not indeed casting off what He was, but even though He became Man by the assumption of flesh and blood He still remained God in nature [*physis*] and in truth.'[19]

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[15] As presented in English in F. Loofs, 'Kenōsis', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings, vol. VII (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1914), pp. 680–7.

[16] A glance at the entry '*Kenōsis*' in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961), with its various sub-categories, is revealing here, showing a prevalence of patristic discussions of Philippians 2 concerned to defend the unchanging nature of the divine essence in spite of the biblical language of 'emptying'.

[17] There is a brief, but clarifying, discussion of Hilary of Poitiers' position in W. Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man* (London, SCM Press, 1968), pp. 307–8. Cyril's distinctive approach to *kenōsis* is well charted in F. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (London, SCM Press, 1983), pp. 260–3, drawing on an important earlier article by R. A. Norris, 'Christological Models in Cyril of Alexandria', *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975), pp. 255–68.

Now, if we again adjust the hermeneutical lens in a feminist direction, we immediately see the further ironies – for a feminist critique such as Hampson's – of the shift out of the New Testament discussion into the patristic one. For in Cyril's theology of *kenōsis* there is no question of any aspects of unchanging divinity being abandoned, restricted, or never taken up in the incarnation; whatever else one may accuse Cyril of, it cannot be that his vision of *kenōsis* signifies a compensatory exercise of masculinist guilt. Far as his metaphysical presumptions may be from Paul's in Philippians 2, then, his deflection of Hampson's charge is as complete: no *actual* 'self-emptying' can occur in Christ, since none of his pre-existent divine attributes could, by definition, be surrendered or modified. Whilst some feminists might wish to question the very construction of divine 'omnipotence' which Cyril is assuming (a point to which I shall return),[20] his theory of *kenōsis* scarcely suffers from squirmings of 'self-abnegation'. Cyril's Christ abandons no 'power' whatever. Thus, to our four-point list of possible interpretations of *kenōsis* gleaned from the New Testament discussion above, we must now add a fifth, and classically 'Alexandrian', one of very different presumptions. The meaning is indeed in straightforward contradiction with some of our earlier definitions, for here *kenōsis* connotes: (5) the divine Logos's *taking on* of human flesh in the incarnation, but without loss, impairment, or restriction of divine powers.

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[18] Again see the discussion and references in Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p. 261.

[19] From Cyril's third letter to Nestorius, translated in T. H. Bindley and F. W. Green (eds.), *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* (London, Methuen, 1950), pp. 213–14. (This is also cited and helpfully discussed by S. W. Sykes in his article, 'The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology' in A. Kee and E. T. Long (eds.), *Being and Truth: Essays in Honour of John Macquarrie* (London, SCM Press, 1986), pp. 350–1.)

[20] Thus Frankenberry's feminist analysis of different forms of theism rejects 'classical theism's' definition of God as hopelessly incoherent from the outset, even in advance of feminist critique (see N. Frankenberry, 'Classical Theism, Panentheism, and Pantheism: On the Relation Between God Construction and Gender Construction', *Zygon* 28 (1993), pp. 30–3). My own (feminist) view, whilst criticizing particular 'masculinist' thematizations of God's nature, is, for philosophical and theological reasons adumbrated in this chapter, more accepting of the 'classical' divine attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, immutability and timelessness (see below, section V).

The christological paradoxes heightened thus by Cyril, and to some ill-defined extent taken over into Chalcedonian 'orthodoxy' a little later,[21] arguably achieved a form of theological coherence at the cost of some strained credibility about the form of Christ's earthly life, and certainly left many points of christological detail unanswered. We shall attempt to show in the remainder of this essay how these points have direct or indirect feminist implications. In particular, the idea of Cyril and others that, in virtue of the union of natures in Christ's *hypostasis* ('person'), one could appropriately 'predicate' attributes of one nature to the other (the so-called *communicatio idomatum*),[22] left question marks about how, precisely and metaphysically, the all-too-human states of anxiety, weakness and ignorance occasionally displayed by Jesus in the gospel narratives could be explained. What effect, if any, should these have on one's perception of the nature of divinity? Could the classical notions of divine omniscience or omnipotence really remain unimpaired? (We note how the particular problems of *kenōsis* here become problems about the nature of incarnation *in general*.) This last, and radical, question was one not adequately faced at all in the patristic, or even scholastic, discussion. Indeed Cyril's solution, as we have intimated, hovered uncomfortably close to our second definition of *kenōsis* given above (though he would doubtless have vigorously denied any suggestion of docetism): that is, Christ, he said, at 'times' in the incarnation '*permitted* his own flesh to experience its proper affections, [and] *permitted* [his human] soul to experience its proper affections';[23] but this was a 'permission' operated all along, it seems, from the unshakeable base of the Logos's unchanging divinity. Thus, since no revision of the notion of divinity was envisaged in the light of the gospel narrative on these points (or in the light of the 'attributed' *communicatio*), and no substantial change to the idea of humanity either, it was hard to see how these manifestations of the so-called *kenōsis* were not, in effect, only an *appearance* in the human nature, and that somewhat sporadic. As christological thought was further developed in the patristic East after Cyril and Chalcedon, a clarification was achieved (by the eighth-century Greek theologian John of Damascus, most significantly) about the metaphysical implications of the *communicatio*. If anything, however, it heightened the quasi-docetic tendencies of Cyril's views: the 'communication' was now explicitly said to operate only *one way* (from the divine to the human), the divine fully permeating the human nature of Christ by an act of 'coinherence' (*perichōrēsis*). What space, then, for those dimensions of Christ's passion most poignantly demonstrating human anxiety, weakness and desolation? Were those to be obliterated by the invasive leakage of divine power into Christ's human nature? If so, the kenotic act of the incarnation could now only signify 'emptying' in the most Pickwickian sense: 'a condescension *inexpressible and inconceivable*', as John of Damascus put it in one of his more revealingly tortured sentences on the matter.[24] Whilst many christological commentators have remarked on the discomforts of this position for the integrity of Christ's human nature *tout court*, our own more pressing (and novel) concerns in this essay are over the implications for a gender analysis of normative human–divine relations. The spectre raised here of a divine force that takes on humanity by controlling and partly *obliterating* it (and all, seductively, in the name of '*kenōsis*') is thus the issue that should properly concern us where the further outworkings of the 'Alexandrian' tradition are concerned: it is a matter of how divine 'power' is construed in relation to the human, and how this could insidiously fuel masculinist purposes, masculinist visions of the subduing of the weaker by the stronger. Thus, while we are still far away from Hampson's initial critique of (one meaning of) *kenōsis*, we may nonetheless here be facing a philosophical issue of more fundamental import. How, that is, are Christian feminists to construe the *hypostatic* 'concurrence' of the human and the divine in Christ (if indeed they wish to defend the Chalcedonian tradition at all) without endorsing a vision of divine power as forceful obliteration?

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[21] The extent to which Cyril's 'Alexandrian' Christology is endorsed in the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 remains a matter for dispute. The Definition represented a compromise between the rival christological schools of Alexandria and Antioch; but it is also a subtle exegetical matter whether we should read it as straightforwardly *identifying* the pre-existent Logos with the *hypostasis* ('person') who unites divine and human 'natures'. Such would be a 'Cyrilline' reading; but it can be challenged. (See A. Baxter, 'Chalcedon, and the Subject in Christ', *Downside Review* 107 (1989), pp. 1–21, and see n. 81 below.) The *Tome* of Pope Leo, which was officially endorsed at Chalcedon, does contain a view of *kenōsis* (*exinanitio* in Latin) comparable to Cyril's; that is, the 'self-emptying' involved is not seen as implying any detraction from Christ's divine characteristics. (On this point, see Sykes, 'The Strange Persistence', p. 351.)

[22] This is a common, if loose, definition of *communicatio idiomatum* (as given, for example, in Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p. 238), but it is not as technically precise as we might wish. Quite how the 'communication' is deemed to operate – in which direction (or both), whether only in virtue of the *hypostasis* or directly from one nature to the other, and if merely by verbal attribution or *in re* – were matters for later dispute (see, for example, Pannenberg, *Jesus*, pp. 296–307, and my further discussion below). None of the patristic authors, however, argued that *human* attributes could be directly attributed to the divine nature.

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[23] Cyril, *De recta fide* II.55, cited in Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p. 262 (my emphasis).

[24] *De recta orthodoxa* III.1, cited in A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1881), p. 73 (my emphasis).

## III

This matter was to take some new turns within early Protestantism. Many centuries later than John of Damascus, in the aftermath of the Lutheran reform in Germany, the question of the *communicatio idiomatum* again became contentious in the light of the interpretation of Philippians 2. This time the issue of the *precise* form of interpenetration between the natures, and especially the implications for expounding the significance of the human nature of Christ with integrity, could no longer be kept at bay. Luther's Christology stressed the extreme vulnerability of Christ on the cross; but at the same time he gave new reinforcement (for reasons to do with his defence of the 'real presence' of Christ in the eucharist) to the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*: the divine had to permeate the human in Christ sufficiently to allow his 'real' (not merely spiritual) presence in multitudinous – and simultaneous – celebrations of the Lord's Supper. But how, then, could Christ's *divinity* be said to be operative in, for instance, his cry of despair at death?[25]

Once this question was pressed, the main European Reformers fell into different camps on the issue, correlated to their divergent views on the Eucharist. Zwingli saw the 'communication' of attributes as no more than a hyperbolic figure of speech; Calvin (in the tradition of the school of Antioch and many of the western Scholastics) saw the attributes of the natures communicating in the *person* of the Saviour, but not interpenetrating directly; whilst the Lutherans, in the Formula of Concord (1577), clarified their preference for the Greek tradition of John of Damascus, insisting that attributes of divinity such as omnipresence and omnipotence fully pervaded the human nature of Christ. But the Lutheran position was still clearly problematic; to arrive back at an 'Alexandrian' solution of the *communicatio* (dictated by the needs of the high eucharistic theology) was merely to beg the question of Christ's human brokenness with which Luther had begun.

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[25] Luther's own position on the *communicatio* is somewhat hard to discern; but it may be deduced from his eucharistic writings and some other texts that he *does* hazard a metaphysically daring 'two-way' understanding of the communication (a position from which followers such as Melanchthon drew back). On this problem of exegesis see esp. E. Metzke, 'Sakrament und Metaphysik. Ein Lutherstudie über das Verhältnis des christlichen Denkens zum Leiblich-Materiellen' in K. Gründer (ed.), *Coincidentia Oppositorum* (Witten, Luther-Verlag, 1961), pp. 158–204. I am grateful to Wilfried Härle for an illuminating discussion on this point.

A school of seventeenth-century Lutherans from Giessen later proposed a solution which returned to Philippians 2 with a slightly novel twist,[26] and one that I wish to suggest might have some life in it as far as a feminist reconstruction is concerned. These theologians suggested that Christ's ostensible weaknesses could be explained in terms of a *kenōsis* operative on his *human* nature, whilst his divine nature retained its powers. The position was thus subtly, though importantly, different from the much earlier Cyrilline one, granted the relocation of the site of 'emptying': whilst Cyril and his Greek successors saw no actual loss in the so-called 'abasements' of incarnation (a *kenōsis* only in name), the Giessen school proposed that the *human* nature of Christ was in effect 'empty' of the possession of such divine attributes as omnipresence and omnipotence during the incarnation – though they added that in virtue of the *union* of the natures there remained the 'possibility' of their reactivation. This last admission was not of course a very happy one (*was* the human nature 'emptied' or not?); and one might well argue that this whole Lutheran debate was being propelled by its unfortunate earlier decision to opt for an interpretation of the *communicatio* that allowed total permeation of the human nature by the divine in the first place (here partially revoked).[27] But one can nonetheless see the good *intentions* of the Giessen school. They were grappling with the crisis of explanation both of Christ's human psychological growth and of his weakness and anxiety in the face of death (a crisis that could only become the more intense with the emergence of modern historiography); and they were doing so within the constraints of a broadly 'Alexandrian' reading of Christology, one that, as we have seen, always teetered towards the 'docetic' in its assumption that the ultimate point of personal identity in Christ could be *identified* with the pre-existent divine Logos. Thus we may perhaps see the Giessen school's vision of *kenōsis* as a variant on our third definition, above (Christ choosing *never to have* certain forms of power in his incarnate life, never to 'grasp'), the difference being that this approach is now linked to a 'two natures' Christology and the 'emptying' applied to the human nature *alone*. That this solution fitted uneasily into its presumed 'Alexandrian' framework we have just indicated; but the possibility raised here of a vision of christological *kenōsis* uniting human 'vulnerability' with authentic divine power (as opposed to worldly or 'patriarchal' visions of power), and uniting them such that the human was wholly translucent to the divine, is I believe of some continuing relevance to Christian feminism, and an issue to which I shall return shortly. For the meantime, let us note that we have at last reached one version, at least, of what Hampson may be rejecting when she accuses 'kenoticism' of being a 'male problem'. That is, if we take something like the Giessen form of *kenōsis* as read, is the 'abandonment' of certain forms of control or power seen here in Christ's human realm to be regarded as of imitative spiritual significance only to *men*? Is Hampson objecting to 'self-emptying', 'vulnerability', or surrendering of 'control' featuring in *any* form in her vision of women's spiritual flourishing?[28]

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[26] There are brief discussions in English of this school's position in J. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1870), II.2, pp. 282–6; Bruce, *Humiliation*, pp. 106–14; Sykes, 'The Strange Persistence', p. 352.

[27] See the criticisms from a Reformed perspective in Bruce, *Humiliation*, Lecture III, esp. pp. 106–14.

Perhaps we can answer this with full clarity only when we have the final version of (nineteenth- and twentieth-century) *kenōsis* also in mind. For here I think is Hampson's real butt: not the relatively obscure post-Reformation reflections on the *communicatio* and the union of the two natures, but the much more daring – and distinctively modern – idea that even the pre-existent *divine* Logos is 'emptied' (in some sense) in the incarnation, actually relinquishing or 'retracting' certain attributes of divinity such as omnipotence or omniscience. It was another Lutheran (the late nineteenth-century Gottfried Thomasius) who took this bold step, and so tackled the remaining difficulties of the *communicatio* head on. As he acutely saw, they were rendered more problematic by the evolving disciplines of biblical criticism and developmental psychology. Did Jesus develop ordinarily as a human child? Was he aware of a pre-existent divine life? Thomasius felt unable to hold on to the orthodox notion of a personal unity of the divine and human in Christ 'without the supposition of a *self-limitation of the divine Logos* coincident with the Incarnation'.[29]

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[28] Such would appear to be the clear implication of Hampson's adjunct essay 'On Power and Gender', *Modern Theology* 4 (1988), pp. 234–50, esp. p. 239: 'I want to suggest that this paradigm [the paradigm of self-giving to another], which men may have found useful, is inappropriate for women. Feminist women seemingly reject it with unanimity.' This is of course precisely the point I am questioning.

[29] An extract from G. Thomasius, *Christi Person und Werk*, II (2nd edn, 1857), translated in C. Welch (ed.), *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology: G. Thomasius, I. A. Dorner, A. E. Biedermann* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 89 (my emphasis).

This, then, was a real *novum*: the idea of a self-limitation of the *divine* realm; but the attempt to express it without incoherence, within a broadly 'Alexandrian' reading of Chalcedon, was to prove at least as difficult (and I believe ultimately more difficult) than the earlier efforts to explicate the 'kenotic' act of incarnation. According to Thomasius, certain divine properties (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) were in Christ shown to be only 'relative' divine characteristics, withdrawn to a condition of 'potency' during the incarnate life of Jesus. This position is somewhat close to our first definition of *kenōsis* given above (the temporary *relinquishing* of divine powers in the incarnation); and yet to say it was a straightforward version of this type would clearly be to mislead: to withdraw *some* divine properties into 'potency' for a while (leaving aside for the moment whether this idea is cogent or not), is clearly not the same thing as a *total* – albeit temporary – relinquishing of divine powers. The distinction is significant, for it has proved useful to a number of distinguished critics of this modern form of *kenōsis* to tar it with the brush of complete, if temporary, abandonment of divine powers (or even of the divine nature),[30] thus mightily confusing this already convoluted problem of definition. In order to avoid this muddle, we shall need to generate a sixth definition of *kenōsis* for Thomasius and his ilk, thus: (6) a temporary retracting (or withdrawing into 'potency') of *certain* characteristics of divinity during the incarnate life. We are now in a position to consider the feminist implications of this development.

## IV

The challenge of expressing views like Thomasius' in pictorial imagery vivid to minds of the time was taken up by a range of British kenoticists in the early part of the twentieth century. It is surely these writers that Hampson has in mind when she launches her attack on *kenōsis* as a 'male' expression of compensatory need or guilt; and she is certainly right to suggest that a gender analysis of their work is long overdue. Frank Weston's *The One Christ*, for instance (originally published in 1907), employs a revealing set of analogies in order to express the 'law of self-restraint' that the Son imposed upon his own divinity in the incarnation. Christ was like ‘St Francis de Sales’, first, acting in a professional role as priest and confessor to his parents (a role seen here as restricted), but in another, wider, role as their son. (We note how, for the purposes of this analogy, the position of ‘priest’ is seen as involving partial ‘limitation’ and restriction of knowledge. This is a far cry from the debates between the sexes over priestly powers in this century; Weston can take a certain form of male priestly authority for granted, but then focus on the professional ‘limitation’ that the confessional imposes.) The next analogy utilized by Weston (Canon of Zanzibar Cathedral at the time) is of an ‘African king’ who is reduced to slavery; another is of a ‘favourite son of a commanding officer’, who has to exercise pretence or filial restraint when he is transferred to his father’s own regiment; and the final suggestion is the analogy of a ‘king’s son’ who leaves his palace and ‘dwell[s] a workman amongst workmen . . . [passing] through all the troubles and vicissitudes of the life of a manual labourer. . .’.[31] *Autres temps, autres moeurs*: one can hardly suppress a smirk of embarrassment at this catalogue of class and gender assumptions. As Hampson indicates, the privileged male can afford to seek some compensatory ‘loss’ in such ways (though, tellingly, only the ‘African king’ seems to lose out substantially in these heart-warming tales of noble self-abnegation). To be fair, Weston is well aware of the fallibility and partiality of his analogues; but far from his mind – naturally enough – is the social and sexual subtext of what he proposes.[32]

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[30] So (misleadingly) J. M. Creed, in his essay 'Recent Tendencies in English Theology' in G. K. A. Bell and A. Deissmann (eds.), *Mysterium Christi* (London, Longman's Green, 1930), p. 133; Donald Baillie in *God Was In Christ* (London, Faber & Faber, 1948), pp. 94–5, 96–7; and David Brown in *The Divine Trinity* (London, Duckworth, 1985), p. 231.

In the slightly earlier writing of Charles Gore, the kenotic analogy was (not much more reassuringly, perhaps, to a feminist) that of empathetic identification with the circumstances of an ‘inferior’: the child, the uneducated, or the ‘savage’. Again, as in Weston, Gore’s christological analysis in *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (1891) and *Dissertations on Subjects Connected with the Incarnation* (1895) is both intricate and profound: there is no denying the originality and sophistication of these writers, for all the (new) problems of coherence they present. Yet Gore, rather bemusingly, could hardly be called a consistent ‘kenoticist’ according to the sixth definition we have just generated. Despite his fairly imprecise talk here about ‘abandonment’ of divine powers in the act of ‘empathy’, his work elsewhere suggests a retention of all divine characteristics, according to a 'two levels of consciousness' model (ironically the one now promulgated by analytic defenders of high Chalcedonian 'orthodoxy').[33] If a bishop understands an 'uneducated' [woman?] or a 'savage', then, he does so without any final ontological change to his privileged make-up.

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[31] See F. Weston, *The One Christ* (London, Longman’s Green, 1914 (1907)), ch. 6, esp. (for these analogies) pp. 166–87. This quotation is from p. 182.

[32] Weston admits the inadequacy of each of his analogies as he discusses them, and esp. on p. 185 of *The One Christ*: ‘these analogies have not taken us very far . . .’. J. Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London, SCM Press, 1993), ch. 6, has recently presented a clear analysis of modern ‘kenoticist’ positions, with philosophical critique, but makes no remark on what I have here termed the ‘social and sexual subtext’ of their accounts.

In the writings of P. T. Forsyth, however (significantly the only Nonconformist of this group of British kenoticists), the tone is somewhat different. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909) presents us with a range of analogies to the 'kenotic' act which involve much greater and more permanent loss than those rehearsed by Gore and Weston (so much so that Forsyth's position veers closer to our first definition of *kenōsis* than our sixth); but the analogies are no less embedded in the presumptions of male social and intellectual superiority. Here we have a 'venerable vizier' who takes poison in the place of a 'foolish young Sultan', and suffers consequent debilitation; a Russian concert violinist who is so committed to the poor (in pre-Revolutionary times) that he undergoes exile and loss of his musical career; and a promising philosophy student who sets aside an academic career to support his family, and so submits to 'drudgery' in 'modern industrial conditions' (which of course blunts his intellectual brilliance!). Forsyth's point, and it is movingly and even persuasively argued, is that a restriction on human freedom, consciously and resolutely accepted by an act of 'supernatural' will, can in due course be seen as a means of glory.[34] But what of those (women, 'workmen', 'African slaves') who arguably do not enjoy the capacity of 'supernatural' freedom in the first place? As with Gore and Weston, the extent to which the assumed 'masculinism' of the vital imagery employed affects the *cogency* or *coherence* of the theological picture is a nice point. The issue of the technical coherence of divine *kenōsis* might seem to be one removed from the precise evocations of a particular thought experiment, to be a matter merely of logic and consistency. Yet it is sometimes only when a range of controlling images or 'intuition pumps' break down (often for reasons beyond those of pure logic) that we realize that we have been obsessed with the wrong questions.[35]

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[33] For Gore's analogies for christological *kenōsis*, see C. Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London, J. Murray, 1891), pp. 159–62 (and note the talk of 'real abandonment' of divine properties, p. 161). In C. Gore, *Dissertations on Subjects Connected with the Incarnation* (New York, C. Scribner's, 1895), p. 93, however, Gore adopts what is now called a 'two centres of consciousness' model, which denies any actual loss of 'divine and cosmic functions' during the incarnation. (R. Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 230, n. 32, comments illuminatingly on the confusion caused by dubbing Gore's position straightforwardly 'kenotic'.) See section V, below, for further discussion of the contemporary 'two centres of consciousness' defence of Chalcedonianism, which is predominantly anti-'kenotic'.

[34] See P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), pp. 296–300.

The early twentieth-century kenoticists, as we have shown, struggled to express divine self-limitation within an 'Alexandrian' reading of Chalcedon. It never occurred to them to question, more radically, whether that particular gloss on Chalcedon (which located the personal identity of Christ undifferentiatedly in the pre-existent divine life of the Logos) was either theologically necessary or textually obvious; just as it never occurred to them to reflect on the gender and class evocations of their analogies (which just as clearly started from a presumption of possessed power and influence). Yet these are the very assumptions we shall shortly wish to question. Oddly, however, Daphne Hampson's critique of *kenōsis* also appears to make some similar gender presumptions. Thus, for her, 'males' (all males, including 'workmen' and 'slaves'?) need to compensate for their tendency to 'dominate' by means of an act of self-emptying; whereas 'women' (all women, including university professors?) do not. The question that now presses, therefore, is whether Hampson may not, in her perceptive critique of early twentieth-century kenoticists, have fallen into the trap of her own gender stereotypes. Has she not assumed, that is, that 'vulnerability' or 'self-effacement' are prescriptively 'female' (though regrettably so), and thus only 'helpful' as a secondary or compensatory addition to 'male' power and dominance; whereas such ('male') power ought now *rightly* to be pursued (also by way of compensation) by feminist women? But why should we continue with these outworn gender presumptions in the first place? Is there not, we might ask, a more creative theological way through our dilemma via a *reformulation* of the very notion of divine 'power' and its relation to the human?

Since Gore, Weston and Forsyth, the discussion of *kenōsis* has taken one more twist – in my view a misleading twist – which may nonetheless help us confront this question more directly and clearly. This is the form of 'kenoticism' aligned to the 'ethical' interpretation of Philippians 2 favoured by C. F. D. Moule (discussed above), but then given a more overt philosophical expression which was to undercut the 'two natures' structure still implicitly retained by Moule. Moule, we recall, spoke of the 'form of the servant' actually revealing the 'nature of God': 'the self-giving humility which *is* the *essence of divinity*'.[36] In line with this kind of exegesis of Philippians 2, John

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[35] This point is well made (in relation to the question of how misleading images may dominate philosophical discussion of free will) by D. C. Dennett in *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 169–71.

[36] See again Moule, 'Further Reflexions', p. 265 (my emphasis).

Robinson was to develop a more metaphysically enunciated notion of *kenōsis as* '*plērōsis*'.[37] Instead, that is, of presuming a substantial pre-existence for Christ and then wondering how a 'human nature' could be compatible with it (the 'Alexandrian' problem, as we have seen, from the start), Robinson proposed a reversal of the traditional directionality of the *communicatio*, and thus a radical seepage of the *human* characteristics into the *divine* – such, indeed, as to collapse the apparatus of the 'two natures' doctrine altogether. Thus the human limitations of Jesus were seen as a positive expression of his divinity rather than as a curtailment of it. In somewhat similar mode, John Macquarrie has written of a 'new-style kenoticism', in which 'the self-emptying of Jesus Christ has not only opened up the depth of a true humanity, but has made known to us the final reality as likewise self-emptying, self-giving and self-limiting'.[38]

Now, it is important to underscore the radicality of what has occurred here. We are no longer speculating about the paradoxical *relationship* of human and divine 'natures' (and then arguing about the possible accommodations necessary when bringing them into 'concurrence'). Rather, it is being urged that the 'limitations' of Jesus' human life are in some sense directly *equatable* with what it is to be 'God'. But can we make coherent sense of this? It is obviously the final philosophical terminus of the 'Thomasian' road; but it goes far beyond anything Thomasius himself envisaged or desired – the *identification* of 'God' as permanently 'limited'. Does this not then also make God intrinsically non-omnipotent and non-omniscient (as opposed to temporally non-omnipotent and non-omniscient under the conditions of incarnation)? And how, then, could such a being be 'God'?

Interestingly, one of the rare *analytic* philosophers of religion to favour kenoticism today, S. T. Davis, seemingly takes these implications to follow from a 'kenotic' approach to Christology too, and in exploring this avenue of approach he parts company with most of his colleagues in the discourse of analytic religious philosophy. His reflections are therefore worthy of some comment. Unlike Robinson, Davis maintains the Chalcedonian structure of pre-existence and the 'two natures' doctrine, but argues that, if the incarnate Christ as depicted in the biblical narrative shows signs of non-omniscience, then an implication may be that omniscience is not, after all, an *essential* property of the divine.[39] But then Davis wavers on this point: it seems he is not familiar with the history of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and which form of it he wishes to espouse. Insofar as he considers allowing this permanent revelatory status for the human life of Christ as a window onto the divine, he is joining hands with Robinson and the other 'new kenoticists' (who embrace the fourth definition of *kenōsis* given above); but insofar as he also talks of Christ's failure in omniscience as only 'temporary' (like a 'skilled tennis player [choosing] to play a game with their weak hand'![40]), he is closer to our first definition of *kenōsis*, where divine characteristics are only briefly set aside for the purposes of the incarnation. The result is not a very happy compromise, and only questionably coherent.[41] Yet the 'new kenoticists', in contrast, seem in even deeper waters metaphysically, as we have intimated. Perhaps it is they, after all, who represent the final outworkings of the liberal 'masculinist' guilt derided by Hampson? Their God, it seems, becomes intrinsically devoid of omniscience and omnipotence (at least in anything like the traditional definitions). Yet it is one thing, of course, to *redefine* divine 'power' creatively, another to shear God down to human size, to make God intrinsically power*less*, incapable of sustaining the creation in being.[42]

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[37] Robinson, *Human Face*, p. 208, citing Moule with approval: '*kenōsis* actually *is plērōsis*'.

[38] See J. Macquarrie, 'Kenoticism Reconsidered', *Theology* 77 (1974), pp. 115–24; this quotation from p. 124.

[39] See S. T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 123–4.

But how then does this recent, or 'new', kenoticism throw light on our feminist agendas? What one sees so interestingly in writers such as Moule, Robinson (and to some degree Davis) is a primary commitment to the given *narrative* of the New Testament, and especially of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life; and this takes precedence even over philosophical questions of apparent coherence, or of traditional *a priori* assumptions about the unchanging divine attributes. Such narrative commitment is a feature of post-War theology in general (especially continental theology), and indeed could be said to be the point at which contemporary theology and analytic philosophy of religion divide most painfully in their fundamental assumptions. What for Barthian theologians, for instance, is seen as the inexplicable and 'absolute paradox' of the incarnation *given* in the irreducible narrative of the biblical text, is for most analytic philosophers of religion (bar, here, in some respects, Davis) instead a matter of the *logical* demonstration of the coherence of the traditional christological formulae, granted certain *a priori* presumptions about the nature of God and humanity.[43] Where the question of gender then insidiously inserts itself into this scholarly divide is in the willingness, or otherwise, to construe forms of 'weakness', 'passivity' or 'vulnerability' (all traditionally demerits for the 'male', but manifestly present in Jesus' passion) as either normatively human or even revelatorily divine. Most philosophers of religion would resist both of these options; some theologians, as we have shown, would consider one or both. If either of the latter positions is sustained, however (and I have already intimated that I prefer the former), then a traditional gender stereotype starts to crumble. That is, if Jesus' 'vulnerability' is a primary narrative given, rather than a philosophical embarrassment to explain away, then precisely the question is raised whether 'vulnerability' *need* be seen as a 'female' weakness rather than a (special sort of) 'human' strength. As in Ruether's standpoint, so here: Jesus may be the male messenger to *empty* 'patriarchal' values.

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[40] Davis, *Logic*, p. 125. (Playing tennis with one's weak hand may be an analogy laudably free from *sexist* overtones, but it is scarcely calculated to inspire spiritually.)

[41] For recent criticism of Davis's position on grounds of coherence, see Hick, *Metaphor of God*, ch. 7. Relevant comments on Davis in a mode more sympathetic to 'kenoticism' are to be found in R. J. Feenstra, 'Reconsidering Kenotic Christology' in R. J. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (South Bend, IN, Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 128–52.

[42] See Sykes in Kee and Long (eds.), *Being and Truth*, pp. 358–60, for critical reflection on this point. (A 'process' view of theism would of course more willingly embrace these implications. See again Frankenberry, 'Classical Theism', pp. 34–9, for a view of Hartshornian 'panentheism' that is read positively by her in terms of gender issues. The full case for my own maintenance of a more 'classical' perception of God is unfortunately impossible within the constraints of this chapter, although some of the main lines of argument are sketched here.)

## V

Such narrative commitment amongst theologians is thus in striking contrast to the general assumptions of mainstream analytical philosophy of religion (with which, as we have shown, Stephen Davis is in somewhat problematic conversation). Here it tends to be assumed that we know, either *a priori* or else via the authority of tradition, what 'God' must look like, as possessing a certain form of omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability and perfect goodness.[44] It also tends to be assumed (especially where the problem of evil dictates the terms of the discussion), that a normatively

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[43] For one of the testier examples of the latter approach, see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1986) esp. ch. 3 and 4. Morris insists that 'the figure of the God-man is in no way at all even a paradox for faith' (p. 74).

[44] See, for example, the much-quoted opening paragraph of R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977), p. I: 'By a theist I understand a man who believes that there is a God. By a "God" he understands something like a "person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe".'

'human' trait is the possession of 'libertarian' freedom, that is, a sovereign self-possession and autonomy that is capable of rising above the weaknesses and distractions of human desires and human tragedy.[45] On this view, then, as in the patristic discussion, the gospel stories of Jesus' vulnerability and anxiety in the face of the cross present a problem to be negotiated, not a narrative prototype to be philosophically explained. But the christological difficulties are, I believe, here sharpened even beyond what Cyril and his ilk confronted. For the sovereignly-free 'individualism' of the Enlightenment 'man of reason',[46] is, when smuggled into christological construction, even more hard to square with the assumed notion of divinity inherited from the 'classical' tradition than the understandings of 'humanity' with which the Fathers themselves operated. Indeed, even the supposedly 'classical' view of God just mentioned shows suspicious signs of bearing the masculinist projections of writers already committed to an Enlightenment view of 'man'. He, too, is another 'individual', a *very large* disembodied spirit with ultimate directive power and freedom.[47] How can the natures of *two* such 'individuals' concur christologically?

This point deserves a little more explication, because it shows how gender presumptions and anxieties are, I believe, lurking in the staunchly conservative – and for the most part staunchly anti-'kenotic' – defence of Chalcedonian orthodoxy found in recent analytical philosophy of religion. (I think here especially of the work of Thomas V. Morris, David Brown and Richard Swinburne.[48]) The first point to note is the defensive resistance to any form of feminist critique evident in the discourse of analytic philosophy of religion in general. With striking disregard for the developments of feminist theology, analytic philosophers of religion have shown almost no cognizance of the profound critique of 'masculinist' notions of God which is now almost taken for granted in theological discussions. Nor have they heeded the rigorous challenges of feminist philosophy, where a complex debate has grown up about the construal of the self and of 'human' freedom in post-Enlightenment philosophy, and the extent to which the notion of either a disembodied soul, or a sovereignly 'free individual', may be masculinist abstractions with little regard for bodily life, feelings or imagination – much less the lessons of child psychology or the formative matrix of primary family relationships.[49] So far, then, analytic philosophy of religion has been remarkable for its resistance to feminist questionings. The silence, we might say, is deafening.

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[45] M. McC. Adams and R. M. Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), esp. the editors' introduction, pp. 10–16, shows with clarity how problems of theodicy have propelled modern philosophers of religion (even Calvinists) towards a 'libertarian' view of freedom (since without such an explanation, the divine responsibility for appalling levels of evil in the world would appear impossible to square with the notion of perfect divine goodness). Adams and Adams do not discuss the question, raised here in my essay, of whether these Christian philosophers are already predisposed towards a 'libertarian' view of freedom on account of their Enlightenment heritage. (For what the masculinist implications of such a view might be, see Frankenberry, 'Classical Theism', pp. 33–4, who comments on the gender presumptions smuggled into discussions of divine power in current analytic philosophy of religion.)

[46] For a discussion of the gendered nature of this Enlightenment figure, in his various forms, see G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), esp. ch. 3–5.

[47] See again Swinburne, *Coherence*, esp. pp. 1–7: God is a 'person' . . . 'in the modern sense' (p. I and n. I). The revised edition of the book (1993), more conscious of trinitarian issues, omits n. I.

[48] See Morris, *Logic*; Brown, *Divine Trinity*; Swinburne, *Christian God*.

But it is precisely in christological discussion that we can see these basic philosophical assumptions made by analytic philosophy of religion beginning to come under strain. S. T. Davis's probing, if uncertain, questionings about *kenōsis* are one sign; another (as with the early twentieth-century 'kenoticists' we discussed earlier) is the revealing analogues that analytic 'anti-kenoticists' bring to bear in their attempt to give clear expression to the humanity and divinity in Christ. Their favourite, significantly, is the analogy of the Freudian 'divided mind'.[50] The idea is that, as in modern psychoanalytic accounts of the self, unconscious forces may be operating – even operating more powerfully – than conscious forces, so too in Christ we may hold up an image of an 'individual' with not one, but two 'centres of consciousness' – one, however (the divine) more powerful and all-encompassing than the other. Thomas Morris talks of an 'asymmetric accessing relation' between 'two minds', the divine encompassing the human; Richard Swinburne of 'two systems of belief to some extent independent of one another'; David Brown, rather differently, of a 'dialogue between . . . conscious and subconscious selves'.[51] However, this basic analogue is a revealing one for a number of reasons. For a start, the very invocation here of the unconscious (or 'subconscious': they are not clearly distinguished), let alone the appeal to Freud, with his messages of deep sexual motivations,[52] is a sign that the more normative 'Enlightenment man' of analytic philosophy of religion is wading out of his depth. For analytic philosophy of religion *properly* to take on Freudian issues of the unconscious or the dream-world, of primary parental relations and of sexuality, would I suspect be to transform its discourse about 'man' and 'God' almost out of all recognition; certainly it would drive it much more closely towards appreciation of feminist theological and philosophical critiques of its basic assumptions. (Contemporary continental philosophy's assimilation of Freud into its categories of discussion is a clear witness to that.[53])

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[49] For discussion of the potential importance of feminist and psychological considerations for contemporary epistemology, see N. Schemann, 'Individualism and Objects of Psychology', and J. Flax, 'Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics' in S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1983), pp. 225–44 and 245–81, respectively.

[50] Utilized in a variety of ways by Brown, *Divine Trinity*; Morris, *Logic*; Swinburne in his article 'Could God Become Man?' in G. Vesey (ed.), *The Philosophy in Christianity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 53–70; and (in somewhat revised form) Swinburne, *Christian God*.

But there are other uneasy aspects of this newly constructed 'orthodox' Christology.[54] For the resistance to raising previously held views about 'God' and 'man' in the light of the gospel passion narratives still shows itself in a number of ways. As in Cyril, we do not *start* from the constraints of the gospel story. Thus, since the dominating idea is that the divine pre-existent Logos must be able to *control* a (possibly resistant?) human nature, there is sometimes a covert 'Apollinarianism' lurking in the discussion, that is, the suggestion that there is a ready-made 'individual' who is the Logos and who, *qua* 'soul', simply has to join with, or take over, a human body. This kind of talk fits ill with the *two* 'centres of consciousness' otherwise promoted.[55] In Morris's work, too, there is a strange mixture, in his account of the two 'wills' in Christ, of a remaining commitment to a 'libertarian' view of human freedom, combined with an underlying concept of the divine as wholly *controlling* it.[56] Thus, as a feminist, I am not particularly consoled or inspired by the thought that Jesus' unique human–divine sinlessness was perhaps rather like a man 'Jones', who, unbeknownst to him, has electrodes implanted in his brain by a big-brother figure, which can then prevent him from doing things that he ought not to do. In fact, however, the electrodes do not have to be operated if Jones does what he should on his own account. This rather chilling parallel is meant to give us an idea of how Jesus could be truly 'free' in a libertarian sense but at the same time 'necessarily good, unable to sin'.[57] Instead, to me as a feminist commentator, the Morrisian fantasy of one who achieves complete 'control' over someone else without that person even realizing it summons up every sort of political and sexual nightmare.

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[51] See Morris, *Logic*, p. 103; Swinburne in Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy*, p. 65; Brown, *Divine Trinity*, p. 262.

[52] For the most part the 'divided mind' christologians wholly ignore this dimension of their own analogy, though – if one pressed it – Freud's deeper sexual motivations would presumably have to be associated with the *divine* nature in Christ (i.e., that 'mind' kept somewhat in the background during Christ's earthly existence). Swinburne's brief exploration of the sexual analogy in Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy*, p. 62, however, sees sexual desire as a *human* temptation which some stronger dimension, analogous to the divine (i.e., the will), should overcome. Perhaps significantly, Swinburne omits this element of the 'two minds' analogy from his more recent (parallel) discussion: Swinburne, *Christian God*, ch. 9.

[53] Thus contemporary French feminisms can build on an existing discussion in French postmodern philosophy of Freud and Lacan: see, by way of introduction, the useful discussion of French feminist writers in C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell), 1987.

[54] See Hick, *Metaphor*, ch. 5, for a clearly expressed critique (motivated *against* traditional Chalcedonianism).

Another sign of strain to these prevalent analytic assumptions about the 'human' emerges in Richard Swinburne's insistence that human and divine natures be kept somewhat 'separate' in Christ (a strangely un-Chalcedonian form of expression[58]), lest the divine nature permeate the human in such a way as to undermine its integrity. The soteriological motivation for this point is admirable, of course, and fully in line with what we have argued above about the dangers of an eastern (or Lutheran) perception of the *communicatio idiomatum* inviting 'obliteration' of the human. What is more revealing in Swinburne's case, however, is his assumption that any sign of minor ignorance, frailty or 'desire' in Jesus is an indication of his *less*-than-perfect 'humanity'. (Indeed, this is perhaps the more profound reason why Swinburne wants to keep Jesus' humanity 'separate' from his divinity.)

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[55] See Swinburne in Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy*, p. 59 ('[Christ's] soul which is subsequently the human soul'), and, more clearly, p. 61 ('joining his [Christ's] soul to an unowned human body'). In Swinburne, *Christian God*, ch. 9, these phrases are repeated (pp. 194, 196), but the suggestion of quasi-Apollinarianism is corrected by a clarification that the 'reasonable [human] soul' of Christ (defended at Chalcedon against Apollinarianism) is not to be seen as an identifiable substance, like Christ's pre-existent divine soul, but rather as 'a human *way of thinking and acting*' (p. 197, my emphasis). This adjustment is arguably still not very comfortable, however, importing as it does a Cartesian notion of 'soul' into the ('Alexandrian') reading of the pre-existent Logos as *identical* with Christ's *hypostasis*.

[56] See Morris, *Logic*, pp. 150–3 (esp. pp. 151–2, drawing on a well-known thought-experiment devised by Harry Frankfurt).

[57] Morris, *Logic*, p. 153.

[58] Recall the injunctions of the Chalcedonian Definition: '. . . in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, *without separation* . . .'.

Thus events like Gethsemane and Golgotha seem to show Jesus' humanity, according to Swinburne, as in some sense *defective* from its true, heavenly norm.[59] But what, we may ask, if the frailty, vulnerability and 'self-effacement' of these narratives *is* what shows us 'perfect humanity'? The resistance to such a possibility is itself, I suggest, one shot through with gender implications; for to admit such would be to start to cut away the ground on which the 'man of reason' stands. But then analytic philosophy of religion is hardly noted, as we have seen, for its positive attention to states of 'passivity', 'vulnerability' or the ceding of 'control' – states, one suspects, that could normally be delegated to the subordinate (and wholly unmentioned) 'female'.[60]

Let me now sum up the results of this complex account of historic debates about *kenōsis* and its gender inflections. What we should underscore, first, about our recent comparative discussion of 'new' (theological) 'kenoticism' on the one hand, and analytic (philosophical) 'anti-kenoticism' on the other, is that both have severe – though very different – drawbacks from a feminist perspective. Whereas the 'new kenoticism' appears to make 'God' both limited and weak (by a process of direct transference from Jesus' human life to the divine), and so endanger the very capacity for divine transformative 'power', the analytic 'orthodoxy' clings ferociously to a vision of divine 'omnipotence' and 'control' which is merely the counterpart of the sexist 'man' made in his (libertarian) image. One model seems propelled by masculinist guilt; the other by unexamined masculinist assumptions. Neither considers – any more than does Hampson – the possibility of a 'strength made perfect *in* (human) weakness' (2 Corinthians 12.9), of the normative concurrence in Christ of non-bullying divine 'power' *with* 'self-effaced' humanity. It is here that the remaining potential of the third definition of *kenōsis* given earlier in our New Testament discussion (a choosing *never to have* 'worldly' forms of power), may yet, I suggest, join hands with the Giessen school's insight that *kenōsis* pertains appropriately to the *human* in a 'two natures' model. Yet we still have to confront the problems, both philosophical and feminist, that we have highlighted about the dominance of the 'Alexandrian' reading of Chalcedon, and to these issues we must now return in our final section. Can we after all locate a systematic alternative, both christological and spiritual, which finds an appropriate place for human *kenōsis* without merely reinforcing gender stereotype or sexist compliance?

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[59] See Swinburne, *Christian God*, p. 208: 'the "divided mind" view... allows the human nature of Christ to be not a nature as perfect as a human nature could be', etc.

[60] There are occasional, and interesting, exceptions to this rule in the discourses of analytic philosophy of religion. R. M. Adams's profound spiritual questioning of the 'lust for control of my own life and its circumstances', in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 18–20, is an important counter-instance (though, significantly, he remarks in a note, p. I, that he owes this insight in large part to his wife). In a christological context, J. R. Lucas has argued (in 'Foreknowledge and the Vulnerability of God' in Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy*, pp. 119–28) that – *contra* Swinburne et al. – the 'Christian God' (as opposed to 'an impersonal Neoplatonist Absolute') is necessarily a 'suffering', 'fallible' and 'vulnerable' God. Ironically, these conclusions seem to arise less from a conviction of the priority of the New Testament narrative (though the passion is briefly mentioned in closing), than from an outworking of philosophical presumptions also shared by Swinburne (and *not* shared by 'classical theists' in the Thomist tradition): the 'libertarian' freewill of the individual, and the en-timed nature of the divine.

Neither Adams nor Lucas, we might note, raises gender issues in making these points about 'vulnerability' and loss of 'control'.

As Stephen Sykes has well observed, the lessons of what he calls 'the strange persistence of kenotic christology' are mainly about failures in *anthropomorphism*.[61] What we tend (unwittingly, often) to read on to God from our human perspective will surely be revealed when we start to think about questions of *kenōsis*. And hence the extraordinary complexity of this historical tale I have just told, and the entanglement of gender themes with metaphysical and semantic choices. Before going on to explicate a feminist version of *kenōsis* which will, I believe, show a way beyond the Ruether–Hampson exchange (and also retrieve those strands in the story which are capable of contemporary application), it may therefore be worth pausing to recapitulate some of the ironies and confusions that have been laid bare in this account.

By distinguishing six different meanings of *kenōsis*, and highlighting the lack of clear interconnections between different discourses on the matter, we have demonstrated how various exponents of *kenōsis* can disagree on even such basic matters as: whether *kenōsis* involves pre-existence (or not); whether it implies a temporary loss of all or some divine characteristics (or neither); whether the 'emptying' applies to the divine nature or the human (or alternatively rejects 'two natures' Christology altogether); and whether the effects of *kenōsis* pass to the eternal nature of the Godhead (or not). Thus, further, when charges of 'kenoticism' are levelled by such as oppose it, they may often turn out to be shadow-boxing, to be attributing to the 'enemy' a position she or he never occupied (the total, if temporary, loss of the divine nature, for instance);[62] and, conversely, someone who (like Gore) embraces the *title* 'kenoticist' may actually hold a position on 'two centres of consciousness' almost indistinguishable from an 'anti-kenotic' defender of Chalcedon.[63]

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[61] See Sykes in Kee and Long (eds.), *Being and Truth*, p. 357. (Sykes is not, however, considering gendered anthropomorphism.)

[62] See again n. 30, above.

As if this complexity were not enough, we have attempted to weave into it a thoroughgoing feminist analysis of the different options. What we now see even more clearly, I trust, is that Hampson's critique scores only against relatively modern forms of *kenōsis*, and in particular those where the 'emptying' is regarded as compensating for an existing set of gender presumptions that might be called 'masculinist'.[64] Thus in the course of our discussion we have detected two fundamental problems with the generalizing tone of Hampson's original criticism of *kenōsis*. First, it does not apply to notions of human *kenōsis* where 'masculinist' (or 'worldly', bullying) forms of power are eschewed *from the outset* by Jesus (and this, it seems, is closer to Ruether's position); and second, it appears to presume the very questions it is begging about gender stereotypes: the alignment of 'males' with achieved, worldly power, and women with lack of it. The presumption is that women *need* 'power' – but of what sort? How are they to avoid aping the 'masculinism' they criticize? In taking up these two points in my closing section I want to sketch out an alternative that Hampson seems not to have considered. For what – as I have hinted several times – if true divine 'empowerment' occurs most unimpededly in the context of a *special* form of human 'vulnerability'?

## VI

But what form should this human vulnerability take? It is no secret why 'vulnerability' has been such a taboo subject in Christian feminist writing up till now.[65] The (rightful) concentration in the literature on the profound, and continuing, damage to women from sexual and physical abuse, even in 'Christian' families and churches, and on the seeming legitimation of this by men otherwise committed to disciplined religious practice and the rhetoric of cruciform redemption,[66] shows what a perilous path we are treading here. An undiscriminating adulation of 'vulnerability' might appear to condone, or even invite, such evils. I do not in any way underestimate these difficulties; nor do I wish to make a straightforward *identification* between 'vulnerability' in general (often a dangerous or regrettable state) and the particular notion of spiritual *kenōsis* here under discussion. But what I am suggesting is that there is another, and longer-term, danger to Christian feminism in the *repression* of all forms of 'vulnerability', and in a concomitant failure to confront issues of fragility, suffering or 'self-emptying' except in terms of victimology. And that is ultimately the failure to embrace a feminist reconceptualizing of the power of the cross and resurrection. Only, I suggest, by facing – and giving new expression to – the paradoxes of 'losing one's life in order to save it', can feminists hope to construct a vision of the Christic 'self' that transcends the gender stereotypes we are seeking to up-end.

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[63] See again n. 33, above.

[64] I am aware of the regrettable looseness with which I have wielded the term 'masculinism' in this chapter. In feminist writing the word tends to be used as a shorthand, to denote attitudes and actions derogatory to women and women's flourishing, but often encouraged or condoned in the population at large, especially amongst men. (Such a definition, however, begs many questions itself. For example: how are such attitudes promoted and sustained? Are women themselves immune from them? What *is* 'women's flourishing'?) For a clear, and critical, introduction to some philosophical issues encountered here, see J. Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions* (London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986), esp. ch. 2 and 7. I hope it will be clear from what I have written that I do not share Hampson's (apparently) essentialist and universalizing views (expressed in Hampson, 'On Power and Gender' and *Theology and Feminism*) that there are fixed 'male' and 'female' approaches to God, human nature, 'power', etc.

But what can I mean by this? I know of no better way to express it than by reflection on the practice of prayer, and especially wordless prayer or 'contemplation'.[67] This is to take a few leaps beyond the notion of *kenōsis* as a speculative christological theory about the incarnate life of Jesus; but if the majority of New Testament commentators are correct, then the 'hymn' of Philippians 2 was, from the start, an invitation to enter into Christ's extended life in the church, not just to speculate dispassionately on his nature.[68] The 'spiritual' extension of Christic *kenōsis*, then (if we can now favour our third definition from above, that is, the avoidance of all 'snatching' from the outset), involves an ascetical commitment of some subtlety, a regular and willed *practice* of ceding and responding to the divine. The rhythm of this *askēsis* is already inscribed ritually and symbolically in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist; but in prayer (especially the defenceless prayer of silent waiting on God) it is 'internalized' over time in a peculiarly demanding and transformative fashion. If I am asked, then, what Christian feminism must do to avoid emulating the very forms of 'worldly' power we criticize in 'masculinism', I point to this *askēsis*. It might be objected (by an extension of Hampson's original argument, though not one she herself applies), that such a danger is not one confronted by women less fortunate, less affluent and less 'powerful' than such as me. But I do wonder about this. Foucault has shown us that we all wield 'power' in *some* area,[69] however insignificant it may appear to the outside world (power over our children, our aged dependants, even our domestic animals). If 'abusive' human power is thus always potentially within our grasp, how can we best approach the healing resources of a non-abusive divine power? How can we hope to invite and channel it, if not by a patient opening of the self to its transformation?

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[65] It would be misleading to suggest it has been completely taboo; indeed, 'vulnerability' in 'mutual relation' (see I. C. Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1982); and R. N. Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York, Crossroad, 1988)), suffering as purposive (see D. Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975) ), and ethical 'risk' (S. D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990) ) have been significant, though not dominant, themes in recent feminist theological writing. There has also been one specific discussion of *kenōsis* from a feminist dialogue with Buddhism: see C. Keller, 'Scoop Up the Water and the Moon in Your Hands: On Feminist Theology and Dynamic Self-Emptying' in J. B. Cobb and C. Ives (eds.), *The Emptying God: A Buddhist–Jewish–Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1990), pp. 102–15.
Much more common in feminist literature, however, is the (wholly understandable) emphasis on 'vulnerability' as an opportunity for masculinist *abuse*: see, for example, M. P. Engel, 'Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable' in S. B. Thistlewaite and M. P. Engel (eds.), *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 152–64.

[66] See the chilling cases of abusive Christian fathers documented in A. Imbens and I. Jonker, *Christianity and Incest* (London, Burns & Oates, 1992).

[67] This dimension of my argument is spelled out in more detail in my forthcoming book on the Trinity, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

What I have elsewhere called the 'paradox of power and vulnerability'[70] is I believe uniquely focused in this act of silent waiting on the divine in prayer. This is because we can only be properly 'empowered' here if we cease to set the agenda, if we 'make space' for God to be God. Prayer which makes this 'space' may take a variety of forms, and should not be conceived in an élitist way; indeed, the debarring of 'ordinary' Christians from 'contemplation' has been one of the most sophisticated – and spiritually mischievous – ways of keeping lay women (and men) from exercising religious influence in the western church.[71] Such prayer may use a repeated phrase to ward off distractions, or be wholly silent; it may be simple Quaker attentiveness, or take a charismatic expression (such as the use of quiet rhythmic 'tongues'). What is sure, however, is that engaging in any such regular and repeated 'waiting on the divine' will involve great personal commitment and (apparently) great personal risk; to put it in psychological terms, the dangers of a too-sudden uprush of material from the unconscious, too immediate a contact of the thus disarmed self with God, are not inconsiderable. To this extent the careful driving of wedges – which began to appear in the western church from the twelfth century on – between 'meditation' (discursive reflection on Scripture) and 'contemplation' (this more vulnerable activity of 'space-making'), were not all cynical in their attempts to keep contemplation 'special'.[72] But whilst risky, this practice is profoundly transformative, 'empowering' in a mysterious 'Christic' sense; for it is a feature of the *special* 'self-effacement' of this gentle space-making – this yielding to divine power which is no worldly power – that it marks one's willed engagement in the pattern of cross and resurrection, one's deeper rooting and grafting into the 'body of Christ'. 'Have *this* mind in you', wrote Paul, 'which was also in Christ Jesus'; the meaning of that elliptical phrase in Greek still remains obscure, but I am far from being the first to interpret it in this spiritual sense, as a 'hidden self-emptying of the heart'.[73]

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[68] This point is well made in Sykes' essay in Kee and Long (eds.), *Being and Truth*, esp. pp. 361–5, though Sykes applies it mainly to the practice of the sacraments.

[69] See Foucault's late essays on power in M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980).

[70] In Oxford Faculty Lectures, 1991 and 1992; further discussed in my forthcoming book *God, Sexuality and the Self.*

[71] This is the theme of Tugwell's anti-élitist arguments in S. Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), esp. chs. 9–11. Tugwell is not, however, especially interested in the gender dimensions of his subject matter, and, whilst lauding Julian of Norwich's theology, is deeply scornful of Margery Kempe (see ch. 16 and pp. 109–10).

If, then, these traditions of Christian 'contemplation' are to be trusted, this rather special form of 'vulnerability' is not an invitation to be battered; nor is its silence a silenc*ing*. (If anything, if builds one in the courage to give prophetic voice.) By choosing to 'make space' in this way, one 'practises' the 'presence of God' – the subtle but enabling presence of a God who neither shouts nor forces, let alone 'obliterates'. No one can *make* one 'contemplate' (though the grace of God invites it); but it is the simplest thing in the world *not* to 'contemplate', to turn away from that grace. Thus the 'vulnerability' that is its human condition is not about asking for unnecessary and unjust suffering (though increased self-knowledge can indeed be painful); nor is it (in Hampson's words) a 'self-abnegation'. On the contrary, this special 'self-emptying' is not a negation of self, but the place of the self's transformation and expansion into God.

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[72] The word 'special' is used by the author of the fourteenth-century *The Cloud of Unknowing* (ed. J. Walsh (London, SPCK, 1981), p. 115) in this context of entry into 'contemplation'. The work of the sixteenth-century Carmelites, Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross, is marked by a particular interest in charting the appropriate moment of transition from 'meditation' to 'contemplation'. On this, see my discussion in 'Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Dom John Chapman OSB (1865–1933) on the Meaning of "Contemplation"' (ch. 2, below) which contains some remarks about the gendered dimension of the issue.

[73] This phrase is from the opening sentence of the Syriac *Book of Steps* (fourth to fifth century), translated in S. Brock (ed.), *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1987), p. 45. I am grateful to Sebastian Brock for a helpful discussion of early Syriac treatments of Philippians 2.

To make such claims as these is clearly to beg many questions. A number of possible misunderstandings (that this prayer is élitist, or the luxury of a leisured class, or an invitation to abuse, or a recipe for political passivity) I have already tried to avert. The 'mystics' of the church have often been from surprising backgrounds, and their messages rightly construed as subversive; their insights have regularly chafed at the edges of doctrinal 'orthodoxy', and they have rejoiced in the coining of startling (sometimes erotically startling) new metaphors to describe their experiences of God. Those who have appealed to a 'dark' knowing beyond speech have thus challenged the smugness of accepted anthropomorphisms for God, have probed (to use the language of contemporary French feminism) to the subversive place of the 'semiotic'.[74]

But no human, contemplative or otherwise, is beyond the reach of either self-deception or manipulation by others; and the spiritual literature of the Christian tradition is rife with examples of male directors who have chosen to confuse this special contemplative 'vulnerability' to the divine with enforced female submission to priestly authority, or to undeserved and unnecessary physical and mental suffering.[75] These problems and dangers can only be confronted, however, by the making of fine, but important, distinctions: between this 'right' vulnerability and mere invitation to abuse;[76] between this contemplative 'self-effacement' and self-destruction or self-repression;[77] between the productive suffering of self-disclosure and the decentring torture of pain for pain's sake.[78] That the making of these 'crucial' distinctions (and I use the word advisedly) is itself powerful,[79] is a lesson only gradually being learned in white feminist theology – such has been the repression of a productive 'theology of the cross' in the face of continuing disclosures of women's abuse in the *name* of the 'cross'. It is striking, indeed, how much less coy is Black womanist theology about naming the 'difference' between abusive 'suffering' on the one hand, and a productive or empowering form of 'pain' on the other;[80] for Black theology has necessarily never evaded the theological problems of undeserved suffering.

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[74] For Kristeva's (Lacanian) appeal to a time preceding the development of language as a source of creativity and feminist subversion, see J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980), and T. Moi's helpful introduction to Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 12–15.

[75] See my discussion of this problem in relation to the spritual direction of J.-P. de Caussade, in '"Femininity" and the Holy Spirit', in M. Furlong (ed.), *Mirror to the Church: Reflections on Sexism* (London, SPCK, 1988), pp. 128–30.

[76] See the discussion of this point by C. Keller in Cobb and Ives (eds.), *The Emptying God*, pp. 105–6.

[77] See Soelle's attempt at this in relation to Eckhart's theology in her lecture 'Mysticism-Liberation-Feminism' in D. Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 79–105.

Where, then, finally, does gender find its place in the 'contemplative' reception to the divine I have tried to describe? The answer is in one sense obvious: is not such willed 'passivity' a traditionally 'female' trait? Is not this precisely why 'mystical' literature has so greatly emphasized the huge psychic reversals for men engaged in such 'submission' to the divine? And hence, is not the obvious danger here the one with which we started, that is, Hampson's charge that *kenōsis* may only be 'useful' to men, as a complement to their masculinism? But I have already tried to hint at a way in which I believe the contemplative exercise may take us beyond such existing gender stereotypes, up-ending them in its gradual undermining of *all* previous certainties and dogmatisms. Here, if I am right, is 'power-in-vulnerability', the willed effacement to a gentle omnipotence which, far from 'complementing' masculinism, acts as its undoing. And whilst spiritual *kenōsis*, thus construed, may, in our current cultural climate, be easy for men to avoid altogether, and even easier, perhaps, for women seriously to misconstrue (as 'appropriate' sexual submission), we cannot rest while such implied 'essentialist' visions of gender still exercise us. When Hampson talks of the 'male' God I fear she is thus resting.

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[78] For a perceptive – and politically astute – discussion of the deliberate destruction of both language and the personality in the act of torture (in distinction from other forms of productive and religiously motivated suffering), see E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 34–5.

[79] This is a point made by Nussbaum in her discussion of 'fragility', 'vulnerability', and 'luck' in Greek thought. See M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. p. xv: 'It occurred to me to ask whether the act of writing about the beauty of human vulnerability is not, paradoxically, a way of rendering oneself less vulnerable and more in control of the uncontrolled elements of life.'

[80] On this point, see Townes' essay, 'Living in the New Jerusalem' in E. M. Townes (ed.), *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll NY, Orbis, 1993), esp. pp. 83–6.

If, moreover, the more speculative christological counterpart of this appeal to *kenōsis* is to be laid bare, it must, as I have hinted, take a form not radically dissimilar from that of the Giessen theologians of the seventeenth century, that is, a form in which the 'emptying' applies to Christ's human nature rather than to the divine. To choose otherwise would be to fall into the manifold incoherencies and difficulties of Thomasius and his descendants, or, with the 'new kenoticists', to reduce God's 'power' to an inherent powerlessness. Yet if we are to avoid the lurking 'docetism' of the Alexandrian tradition, we shall also have to embrace a reading of Chalcedon that owes more to the Christology of the rival school of Antioch, that is, one in which Christ's personal identity (his *hypostasis*) is *confected out* of the 'concurrence' of the human and the divine, not simply *identified with* the invulnerable pre-existent Logos.[81] In other words, what Christ on this view instantiates is the very 'mind' that we ourselves enact, or enter into, in prayer: the unique intersection of vulnerable, 'non-grasping' humanity and authentic divine power, itself 'made perfect in weakness'.

Ultimately, of course, Christian virtue is known by its 'fruits'. Perhaps this is the only final and safe test of 'contemplation', in which activity – I freely admit – so much self-deception, and so much bewilderment and uncertainty, can attend even faithful and regular practice. Strangely, I think this – my practical conclusion about 'fruits' – is the point at which Hampson is most likely to agree with me: our theological conceptions and institutional commitments diverge at many points, but our sense of what feminism aims to gain and display is curiously convergent. What then do we seek in feminist *discretio spirituum*? Love, joy, peace – yes, and all the other Pauline spiritual fruits and gifts; but especially we must add to these: personal empowerment, prophetic resistance, courage in the face of oppression, and the destruction of false idolatry. What Hampson and other post-

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[81] This is, I believe, a legitimate (though 'Antiochene' leaning) way of reading the Chalcedonian Definition, granted that the word *hypostasis* does not appear in the Definition until the phrase relating to the 'concurrence' of the natures, and is not explicitly identified with the pre-existent Logos. On the significance of this 'Antiochene' reading, see the important article by A. Baxter, 'Chalcedon, and the Subject in Christ', *Downside Review* 107 (1989), pp. 1–21. The full implications, philosophical and theological, of developing this interpretation of Chalcedon, can unfortunately not be spelled out here; but it is instructive to note that feminist writers on Christology have so far been divided on whether the 'Alexandrian' or 'Antiochene' traditions hold more promise for a feminist standpoint. See P. Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983), esp. pp. 83–4, for a position sympathetic to the 'Alexandrian' reading of Chalcedon, and Heyward, *Redemption of God*, esp. pp. 189–92, for a champion of the 'Antiochene' school.

Christians do not believe in any more, however, is the importance of what we may call the narrative 'gap', the *hiatus* of expectant waiting, that is, the precondition of our assimilation of Christ's 'kenotic' cross and resurrection. That this form of waiting often brings bewilderment and pain as the new 'self' struggles to birth, I cannot deny; that it is also transformative and empowering, I affirm; that Christian feminism ignores it at its peril, I have here tried to suggest; and that it is what finally keeps me a Christian as well as a feminist, it has been the task of this chapter to explore.

But what, then, is this 'contemplation' whose exercise proves so vital to the particular form of human empowerment I have here discussed? To a more severely practical consideration of this matter we now turn.