

Kenosis of the Spirit into Creation

Bradford McCall

I. INTRODUCTION

Whether or not creation is eternal is certainly not a new question. Apparently as early as written language appeared, the idea of an eternal creation was favoured by pagan philosophers. Into this confusion, the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was formulated in the second century to dispel such an idea and to affirm God's transcendence. The question of creation arises anew today in light of the current world view, marked by the scientific notion of evolution, which has compelled new models of divine action to emerge. Recently, a collection of essays by theologians and scientists explored creation as *The Work of Love*, pointing to divine action as kenosis.¹ The resurgence of kenotic theology has been helpful in striving to reformulate divine action in an evolutionary world. The kenotic theology posited by this paper maintains that the Spirit, who *is* Love,² completely shares and imparts Himself *into* creation.

The Spirit of God "poured Himself out" into creation, thereby causing it to leap forth from chaos and become a structured and orderly system of life-bearing entities. Theologians as early as Ephraem the Syrian recognized that creation was initiated through the Spirit. Indeed, Ephraem writes in his *Commentary on Genesis 1*,

[The Holy Spirit] warmed the waters with a kind of vital warmth, even bringing them to a boil through intense heat in order to make them fertile. The action of a hen is similar. It sits on its eggs, making them fertile through the warmth of incubation ... Thus we learn that all was brought to perfection and accomplished by the Trinity.³

As a result of this *Breath* of God imparted, nature gives birth to life, and *life-bearing* creatures burst upon the environ.⁴ So then, Ephraem sees the Spirit as the life-giving force that enables creation to strive toward becoming its fullness (via the process of evolution). The creating Spirit freely limits his infinite power so as to allow for the existence of non-infinite entities.⁵

¹ John Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

² 1 John 4:16

³ J. A. Assemani, ed., *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia* (Rome, 1737), 1:117.

⁴ Holmes Ralston III, "Kenosis and Nature", in *The Work of Love*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 58.

⁵ Phillip Clayton, "Kenotic Trinitarian Panentheism," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 3 (2005): 252.

This paper affirms the notion that creation was a result of the kenotic act of the Spirit *into* creation. Thus, this paper affirms the notion that the creation of matter and world has its *ontological origin in and through* the agency of the Spirit of God. Creation is a kenotic act of *self-offering*. Therefore, one may accurately posit that creation, in a *qualified* sense, possesses the Spirit of God from its very *origin*, though one needs to be wary of falling into pantheism. Instead of reducing the created world into a pantheistic entity, God is an 'all-embracing unity' and the world exists 'in' God in the sense that God is the ground of being for the created world (panentheism is here advocated).

II. KENOSIS IN THE TWO TESTAMENTS

The Greek verb *kenō* can mean either 'to empty', or 'to pour out'. In the literal sense its Hebrew equivalent is used, for example, in Isaiah 32:15: "Until the spirit be *poured upon* us from on high..." The verb, which appears fourteen times in biblical Hebrew, has cognates in Akkadian, Phoenician, Egyptian, and Syriac. In its original sense, the verb refers to a cause of movement leading to a mass being poured out of a container.⁶ Thus, the word also means "to pour out" in reference to Rebekah's *pouring out* the water from her pitcher *into* the trough (Gen. 24:20, the verb in the LXX is *exekenōsen*). In the original Hebrew of Gen. 24:20, the term employed is a primitive root, meaning to *be* (i.e. causatively to *make*) *empty*. Hence, it is appropriate to translate the term as either to *empty*, or to *pour out*. Note here that whereas the *pitcher* was *emptied*, the *trough* was made *full* (which is in a sense *addition*) by the emptying of the pitcher.⁷ It is therefore concluded that a fruitful approach to understanding this difficult phrase is to realize that the verb *kenō* also means "to pour out."

I posit that the kenosis of the Spirit into creation had a similar effect as Rebekah's pouring of the water *into* the trough. There is an inherent other-centeredness in kenosis, as one can see in Rebekah's case, as well as both Christ's kenosis and Paul's kenosis. It may be extrapolated, further, that the same other-centeredness is present with the Spirit's kenosis into creation. The pre-existent Christ poured himself into humanity so that it could be reconciled to the Father and that it might be acceptable to Him (Phil. 2:5-11), as the Father intentioned from the beginning. God, in the person of the Son, "enters into the limited, finite situation of man. Not only does he enter into it, descend into it, but also he accepts it and embraces the whole of human existence his being."⁸ Paul similarly poured himself into the Church and its mission so that the reconciliation

⁶James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷D. R. W. Wood et al., ed., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 643.

⁸Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 176.

to the Father wrought by Christ might be appropriated by the mass of men and women (Phil. 3:7-9, Gal. 2:20, 3:28-29, 1 Cor. 9:16), as the Father intensioned from the beginning.⁹

The Spirit of God, moreover, kenotically empowered the incarnation, life and death of the Son of God.¹⁰ Indeed, by the kenotic action of the Spirit in baptism, Jesus of Nazareth was empowered for his subsequent ministry. Moreover, the kenosis of the Son of God on the cross offers an analogical understanding to the kenosis of the Spirit of God into creation. The Son of God was *poured into* mankind, became man, and then returned to the Father. Additionally, by the kenotic action of the Spirit in the resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth debilitated the damning effects of sin. In the transfiguration, the kenotic action of the Spirit revealed a portion of the glory of God the Father through God the Son.¹¹ In reality, all of the works of the Christ from God were actualized by the kenotic action of the Spirit (Christ is the *anointed* One, note). One may properly adduce that the Father sends the Son into the material *through* the agency of the Spirit, who later gets sent into the world *through* the Son.¹² So then, kenosis is the general way in which God interacts with the world.

It is interesting to ponder that the term “kenosis” is most frequently linked to Christ’s voluntary renunciation of certain divine attributes, in order to identify himself with humanity, as recorded in the Pauline hymn found in Phil. 2:5-11. However, the kenosis of the Son of God referred to in the passage of Phil. 2:5-11 *cannot* be understood to mean a *subtraction* of divinity, but the *addition* of humanity instead. Instead, in the passage of Phil. 2:5-11 itself, the verb often translated as “emptied” is *explained, expanded, and extrapolated* by three participles that directly follow it — 1) *taking* the form of a servant, 2) *becoming* in the likeness of men, and 3) *being found* in fashion as a man. Clearly, even in this reference to Christological kenosis, the effect is *addition*. Furthermore, the Philippians usage of the term kenosis eerily resembles that which is found in Isaiah 53:12, which reads that “[h]e *poured out* his soul to death.” I posit that it is this meaning of kenosis, i.e. “poured out”, that is best indicative to the kenosis of the Spirit of God *into* creation. So then, the principle that one may draw from the usage of kenosis in reference to God the Son is illustrative of the kenosis in reference to God the Spirit regarding the divine essence. This kenosis of the Spirit can also be seen, for example, in his descent upon Jesus at his baptism. Indeed, the Spirit was *poured into* Jesus so as to *empower* Jesus for his crucial ministry of imparting life to the masses, which resulted in Jesus’ own temporal and bodily death.

⁹ Chrestos Patitsas, “Kenosis According to Saint Paul,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982): 77.

¹⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 257.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 346.

¹² *Ibid.*, 263.

III. BEYOND THE TWO TESTAMENTS' USAGE OF KENOSIS

This kenosis of the Spirit into creation enables the *finite* creation to coexist with the *infinite* Godhead. Thus, the kenosis of the Spirit into creation is supremely an act of love by the Father of all righteousness. The kenosis of the Spirit into creation directly entails the notion that creatures owe their existence to the Spirit's creative energies imparted into creation. So then, the Spirit's most potent role — being *poured into* others and other things — makes possible both the life and the activity of the other.¹³

The entire mission of the Spirit could be succinctly envisioned as one of kenosis.¹⁴ By extrapolation, one may infer that the Spirit was *poured into* creation so that it might develop fully in complexity into what the Father had intentioned from the beginning. The verb used in Gen. 1:2 depicts the presence of the Spirit of God hovering mysteriously over the waters, preparing for the acts of creation to follow. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew verb has been translated “hovering” (as a bird over her young, see Deut. 32:11), whereas the cognate Syriac term means “to brood over; to incubate.” That the Spirit of God was hovering like a mother stork might hover over her nest is a portent of life to come from the dark, murky depths of the chaos below.¹⁵ The original terms *thw* and *bhw* of Gen. 1:2, which are often translated as *without form and void*, are of uncertain etymology; however, wherever they are used, they convey the idea of *confusion* and *disorder*. The wording of *thw* and *bhw* in Gen. 1:2 expresses the *quivering* motion made by the hen while *hatching* her eggs and *fostering* her young. So then, the Spirit, one may postulate, is ultimately responsible for both the conditions for life, as well as life itself. Indeed, the Spirit is the “executive arm” (i.e. the *enacting*, or *effectual* arm) in that he was active as the Father spoke each word in the primal creating moments recorded in Gen. 1.¹⁶

What God does in *particular* and *singularly* in the kenosis of the Son into human form, I posit, God does in *general* and *continually* in the kenosis of the Spirit into creation. The Spirit is the *breath of life*, the very giver of life, and is thus the creative power of the Father. The Spirit, then, is the *vital* energy that enlivens, as well as the *potent* force that makes practical the Father's gratuitous acts toward created things. The kenosis of the Spirit, the *pouring out* of life, makes possible not only otherness as properly conceived, but also its actualization. Kenosis is certainly not a picture of a traditional monological act of creation by direct production. Instead, by creating in a kenotic manner, God both *allows* and *invites* the input of creatures in the activity of creation,

¹³ Jane E. Linahan, “Experiencing God in Brokenness: The Self-emptying of Holy Spirit in Moltmann's Pneumatology,” in *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Religious Experience*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Hans Geybels, and Stijn Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 181.

¹⁴ Richard Lucien, *Kenosis and Creation* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 116.

¹⁵ Note that the Spirit is described as a *dove* in Matt. 3:16.

¹⁶ Note also that the Spirit, or breath of God, is likewise presupposed in the creation accounts of John 1 that depict the Son's agency.

and *reacts* according to that input. Thus, God has chosen to allow the *other* to act, and has chosen to invite creation into a cooperative relationship. So then, God works with what has already been created to develop the creation still further.

The kenotic creating Spirit does not overrule his creation or its creatures, but continuously *interacts* with them instead. Polkinghorne summarizes his view by saying that God allows the created other to be and to act, so that, while all that happens is permitted by God's general providence, not all that happens is in accordance with God's will or brought about by divine special providence. Such an understanding is basic to the interpretation of evolutionary history as creation making itself.

So then, creation is an act of divine kenosis, an expression exercised by love, through which the Creator allows creatures to be themselves. Moreover, in order to be consistent within the *causal nexus*, the Spirit of God kenotically bestows causal power to the created order, and in effect thereafter becomes the chief Cause amongst causes.¹⁷ According to Bulgakov, God the Father always acts by *persuasion*, and not by compulsion, which is exemplified by the action of the Spirit of God in creation.¹⁸ So then, the kenotic Creating Spirit does not over-rule his creatures, but *interacts* with them instead. In an expansive chapter that explicates the *Revelation of the Holy Spirit*, Bulgakov first highlights the kenosis of the Spirit into Creation. Bulgakov begins his discussion of the *Revelation of the Holy Spirit* with the kenosis of the Spirit of God into creation, because it is the basis of all subsequent revelation. For Bulgakov, then, kenosis, the divine *self-pouring out*, is the essential revelation of who God is.¹⁹ The implication of the priority of the Spirit in revelation gives credence to the notion of priority of the Spirit in creation, making his kenosis the fundamental basis of the derivation of complexity within creation.

IV. KENOSIS AND CREATION UNDERSTOOD AS POTENTIALITY:

In creation, the Spirit kenotically bestows both *potentiality* and "being" ("Let there be ..."). As Michael Lodahl notes, the "Spirit of God is identified as the possibility of God."²⁰ Moreover, hiddenness is the basis of kenosis, notes Ernest Simmons.²¹ So then, creation is, in a sense, *larva dei*, the *mask of God*. We encounter God through masks because that is the only way in which finite beings can associate with the Infinite ground of all being. Simmons notes that the Hebrew *nwh*, as well as the Greek *pneuma*, both carry with them a sense of hidden and unseen

¹⁷ Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, 104.

¹⁸ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 219.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁰ Michael Lodahl, *From God to Creation: Pursuing the Trinitarian Reflections of Gregory of Nyssa as a Critique of Creation ex Nihilo*, Paper presented to the American Academy of Religion, 2004 Annual Meeting, 4.

²¹ Ernest Simmons, "Towards kenotic Pneumatology: Quantum Field Theory and the Theology of the Cross," *CTNS Bulletin* 19 no. 2 (1999): 11-16.

forces.²² Being panentheistic in relation, there is both distinction and relatedness between the Spirit and creation. Because the Spirit and creation are intrinsically joined together, there is no need of a “causal joint” *per se*, for they are composed of the same potentiality.

The properties of the propensities within the evolutionary epic can be regarded as a feature that has been endowed by Spirit. So then, “instead of being daunted by the role of chance in genetic mutations as being the manifestation of irrationality in the Universe, it would be more consistent with the observations to assert that the full gamut of potentialities of living matter could be explored only through the agency of the rapid and frequent randomization which is possible at the molecular level of DNA.”²³ The way in which ‘chance’ operates within the world to produce new structures, new entities, and even new species, can properly be understood as an actualization of the potentialities with which the Creating Spirit imbued creation. Thus, the creating Spirit’s intention and purpose is actualized through the operation of what may be called ‘chance’ and ‘random’ events. One can thereby perceive God within evolution; indeed, the processes themselves, as unveiled by the biological sciences, are God-acting-as-Creator.

Perhaps these potentials are delimited through what Polkinghorne refers to as “informational causality,”²⁴ which bears some similarity to the *formal cause* of Aristotle.

G. G. Simpson writes that “within the framework of the evolutionary history of life, there have been not one but many different kinds of progress,” which is a correlate to the notion of the actualization of possibilities.²⁵ Moreover, Popper points out that the realization of possibilities, which may be random, depends upon the total situation within which the possibilities are being actualized so that there “exist weighted possibilities which are more than mere possibilities, but [are rather] ... “tendencies or propensities to become real.”²⁶ Peacocke suggests that there are propensities in evolution, of the Popperian sense noted above, towards the possession of certain features and characteristics, propensities which are ‘built into’ the evolutionary process. Among these propensities of evolution, Peacocke notes, are “complexity” and “information-processing and storage-ability.”²⁷

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 94.

²⁴ Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, 99.

²⁵ These are examples: the increasing specialization with its corollary of improvement and adaptability; increase in the general energy or maintained level of processes; increasing complexity, and so forth, according to George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University, 1971), 236.

²⁶ Karl Popper, *A World of Propensities* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 12.

²⁷ Peacocke, *The Work of Love*, 30.

Regarding these propensities in evolution, Conway Morris notes that “within certain limits the outcome of evolutionary processes might be rather predictable ... [as] nearly all biologists agree that convergence is a ubiquitous feature of life ... [for] again and again we have evidence of biological form stumbling on the same solution to a problem.”²⁸ Gould contends that there can be overall direction and implantation of divine purpose through what may popularly be called ‘chance’ that operates within a rule-obeying context.²⁹ However, neither Gould nor Peacocke sees these “propensities” as a *special* providential action by God *per se*, but rather a consequence of how God continuously creates through the processes that he has made (and hence merely a *general* providential action). Contra Gould and Peacocke, I assert that the Spirit communicates at every moment what A. N. Whitehead calls divine “initial aims” to creatures.³⁰

In A. N. Whitehead’s philosophy of organism, an initial aim is the means by which God *influences*, but *not determines*, the outcome of all the world’s processes. This *initial aim*, I posit, is provided by the kenotic pouring into matter by the Spirit. Although God has influence over all processes of the universe, “luring” them into the future, every event still has power to exert its own creative influence on its future.³¹ The initial aim of God is to always unfold maximum molecular possibilities, potential, novelty and complexity.³² I posit that God provides the initial aim by the kenotic Spirit. This initial aim is then nourished by the lure of fullness. To invoke Tillichian language, the kenotic Spirit is the ground of causation of the becoming of all that is.

Emphasis on divine love seems to lie behind process theology’s picture of a God, who in A. N. Whitehead’s moving phrase, is a “fellow sufferer who understands,” and who acts only through the power of persuasion.³³ Whitehead held that God and the world have always coexisted, and that God creates by working with what exists. An eternal creation for Whitehead rests on God’s relational nature. However, in distinction from Whitehead’s assertion that God only acts through persuasion, the kenotic view of creation that I advocate posits that God acts through *luring* creation and its creatures toward his pre-established goal (greater complexity). Moreover, contrary to what both Peacocke and Gould assert, I posit that there is a definitive *lure* of the Spirit within the *propensities* of nature. So then, it is at least conceivable that the kenotic impartation of the Spirit into creation effects and/or causes these “propensities” in nature.

²⁸ Simon Conway Morris, *The Crucible of Creation: The Burgess Shale and the Rise of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205.

²⁹ Stephen J. Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 51.

³⁰ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne Corrected ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), 244.

³¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: MacMillan, 1978), 346. Note that this assertion has direct implications regarding the possibility of creation (and later, humans) denying and/or resisting the lure of God.

³² Ross L. Stein, “An Inquiry into the Origins of Life on Earth — A Synthesis of Process Thought in Science and Theology,” *Zygon*, 41 no. 4 (2006): 1004.

³³ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 350.

V. KENOSIS AND THE CREATION OF FORMLESS MATTER

These propensities and potential, as it were, are directed by the ordering principle of the Spirit, following his kenosis into creation. In Justin Martyr, one finds much credence to the notion that formless matter was ordered by God into a productive and life-bearing creation.³⁴ For example, Justin Martyr states:

But we have received by tradition that God does not need the material offerings which men can give, seeing, indeed, that He Himself is the provider of all things. And we have been taught, and are convinced, and do believe, that He accepts those only who imitate the excellences which reside in Him, temperance, and justice, and philanthropy, and as many virtues as are peculiar to a God who is called by no proper name. And we have been taught that He in the beginning did of His goodness, for man's sake, create all things out of unformed matter.³⁵

It is essential to note that Justin Martyr, in his *Apology I* 10.2, states that God created the world out of "formless matter," which in context is a rebuttal of creation *ex nihilo*. However, I am using Justin Martyr's statement in order to posit that indeed formless matter could have existed for a time before God the Spirit ordered it into creation. So then, apparently creation progressed from a state of *nothingness* through a state of formlessness and then into a condition in which the formlessness gave way to form. Matter's receptivity to spirit, which has form as a requisite, also has as its precondition the creaturely descent of the Spirit, his kenosis in creation.³⁶ For Bulgakov, matter itself is the direct result of the kenotic action of the Spirit of God into creation.³⁷ Thus, the Spirit seems at first to have created the elementary principles of all things, creating formless masses of matter, which was *without* arrangement or distinction of parts. Ironically, this idea is well expressed by an ancient heathen poet:

Before the seas and this terrestrial ball,
And heaven's high canopy that covers all,
One was the face of nature, if a face;
Rather, a rude and indigested mass;
A lifeless lump, unfashion'd and unframed,

³⁴ I interpret Justin Martyr's statements regarding "God" in general to relate to God the Spirit.

³⁵ Justin Martyr, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 165.

³⁶ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

Of jarring seeds, and justly Chaos named.

DRYDEN.³⁸

Ambrose did not posit that God created a fully formed creation by divine fiat. Ambrose notes clearly that creating precedes ordering. In his *Hexaemeron*, Ambrose writes that:

The good architect lays the foundation first and afterward, when the foundation has been laid, plots the various parts of the building, one after the other, and then adds to it the ornamentation ... Scripture points out that things were first created and afterward put in order lest it be supposed that they were not actually created and that they had no beginning, just as if the nature of things had been, as it were, generated from the beginning and did not appear to be something added afterward (1.7).³⁹

Later in his *Hexaemeron*, Ambrose comments upon the Spirit's role in creation, and notes that:

The Spirit fittingly moved over the earth, destined to bear fruit because by the aid of the Spirit it held the seeds of new birth which were to germinate according to the words of the prophet in Psalms 104:30: "Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created and thou shall renew the face of the earth." (1.8).⁴⁰

In his *Confessions*, Augustine notes that the earth, directly following creation, was *formless* matter. Augustine writes,

The earth was invisible and unorganized, and darkness was over the abyss. Formlessness is suggested by these words, so that we might grasp the meaning by degrees, for we are unable to think cognitively about an absolute privation of form that still does not go as far as nothing (12.15).⁴¹

Moreover, Basil of Caesarea similarly notes that creation was not fully complete and formed upon the 'first day' (my own words) of creation. Basil writes in his *Hexaemeron*:

Surely the perfect condition of the earth consists in its state of abundance: the budding of all sorts of plants, the putting forth of the lofty trees both fruitful and barren, the freshness and fragrance of flowers, and whatever things appeared on earth a little later by the command of God to adorn their mother. Since as yet there was nothing of this, the

³⁸ Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: Genesis*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Clarke's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), Gen. 1:2.

³⁹ Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Joseph N. Magee, ed. (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1947-), 42:26, 29.

⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, in *Fathers of the Church*, ed. Joseph N. Magee, 42:32–33.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, in *Fathers of the Church* ed. Joseph N. Magee, 21:379.

Scripture reasonably spoke of it as incomplete. We might say the same also about the heavens; that they were not yet brought to perfection themselves, nor had they received their proper adornment, since they were not yet lighted around by the moon nor the sun, nor crowned by the choirs of the stars. For these things had not yet been made. Therefore you will not err from the truth if you say that the heavens also were incomplete. (2.1).⁴²

Although it should be noted that Gregory of Nyssa's writings regarding the potentiality of God's creation are akin to Aristotle's ideas of act and potency, Gregory's words are here interpreted in reference to the Spirit's activity in creation. According to Gregory of Nyssa, all things develop toward a natural and necessary order planned by the Creator. Gregory writes,

[J]ust as we say that in wheat, or in any other grain, the whole form of the plant is potentially included — the leaves, the stalk, the joints, the grain, the bread — and do not say in our account of its nature that any of these things has pre-existence, or comes into being before the others, but that the power abiding in the seed is manifested in a certain natural order, not by any means that another nature is infused into it — in the same way we suppose the human germ to possess the potentiality of its nature, sown with it at the first start of its existence, and that it is unfolded and manifested by a natural sequence as it proceeds to its perfect state, not employing anything external to itself as a stepping-stone to perfection, but itself advancing its own self in due course to the perfect state...[similarly] we cannot discern the articulation of the limbs in that which is implanted for the conception of the body before it begins to take form; ... for even the form of the future man is there potentially, but is concealed because it is not possible that it should be made visible before the necessary sequence of events allows it ... [Moreover] since it is not from a dead body that the potentiality for conception is secreted, but from one which is animate and alive, we hence affirm that it is reasonable that we should not suppose that what is sent forth from a living body to be the occasion of life is itself dead and inanimate ... For in the case of men we consider it an evidence of life that one is warm and operative and in motion, but the chill and motionless state in the case of bodies is nothing else than deadness.⁴³

From the comments above from Gregory of Nyssa, one may infer that *movement* and *change* are *intrinsic* to creation. So then, *creatio continua*, continuing creation, is an integral concept in the

⁴² Basil of Caesarea, in *Fathers of the Church*, ed. Joseph N. Magee, 46:22.

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. 5*, ed. Philip Schaff (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 421.

understanding of the Spirit's creative action, and of the Spirit's kenosis *into* creation. The immanent Creator Spirit is continuously creating and continuously breathing life into the creation.

VI. KENOSIS AND *CREATIO CONTINUA*

The Spirit of God did not need to create in a single, direct act, but instead was able to create a process in which creation was allowed to develop. This can be seen, for example, by coalescing pneumatology with the modern big bang theory, whereby the Spirit can be viewed as the *originating principle*, creating matter, who sets the big bang in motion. So then, instead of creating a *finished* product by *divine fiat*, the Spirit allows the world to *develop* within the framework that he set up. This notion of creation through *development* also leads to an understanding of *biological evolution* in which the Spirit is seen as using the development of creatures as a type of *continuing creation*. There exists overwhelming evidence of a universe marked by development, which points to creation by kenosis. And it should be noted that the Spirit is present "in, with, and under" the processes of biological evolution within the created world.⁴⁴ The kenotic creating Spirit is present within the *historical contingency* of evolution, as well as its *lawful regularity*.⁴⁵ Thus, the Spirit acts within the *causal nexus* of creation (i.e. natural law, divine providence, and later human action) to input pure informational content by means of the impartation of active energy within creation.⁴⁶ So then, the Spirit did not bring about creation in a *single*, definitive action, but instead used a process of evolution guided by natural laws.

It is important, therefore, to view the Spirit not only as *originating principle* of creation, but also as *sustainer* of creation, upholding its order, and *giving it life*. John Polkinghorne speaks of a kenosis regarding the Spirit's causal status in creation in a manner very similar to Bulgakov. Polkinghorne writes, "[p]art of a notion of *creatio continua* must surely be that an evolving universe is one which is theologically understood as being allowed, within divine providence, 'to make itself'"⁴⁷ Rather than bringing into being a ready-made world of unalterable character, God the Father allows the creation, kenotically empowered by the Spirit, to develop according to its own pace. This evolving fertility is not a linear progression, but is staggered instead, as the Spirit is not the manipulator of creation, but its director instead. So then, as Vanstone notes, the activity of the Spirit within creation proceeds by no assured program, but is precarious in contrast.⁴⁸ One may deduce, therefore, that the Spirit makes things able to make themselves, which affirms a *panentheistic* perspective. Theologians today, then, are correct to contemplate this long process as God's

⁴⁴ Arthur Peacocke, *The Work of Love*, 32.

⁴⁵ Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, 96.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁷ J. C. Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1995), 84.

⁴⁸ W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 62.

continued creation, mediated by the interplay of laws and chance.⁴⁹ As a consequence of positing *creatio continua*, one must insist that the Spirit's providential power is manifest in the unfolding of creation in evolutionary history.⁵⁰

St. John Chrysostom also says that God's providence in the world is akin to continuing creation. In Chrysostom's commentary regarding the Gospel according to John, one finds the following statements in reference to God's timely and unfolding actions:

...for the same Evangelist says, "They could not lay hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come" (8:20); and again, "No man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come" (7:30); and again, "The hour is come, glorify Thy Son." (17:1.) What then do the words mean? He desires to show this; that He works all things at their *convenient season*, not doing all at once; because a kind of confusion and disorder would have ensued, if, instead of working all at their *proper seasons*, He had mixed all together, His Birth, His Resurrection, and His coming to Judgment. Observe this; *creation was to be, yet not all at once*; man and woman were to be created, yet not even these together; mankind was to be condemned to death, and there was to be a resurrection, yet the interval between the two was to be great; the law was to be given, but not grace with it, each was to be dispensed at its *proper time*.⁵¹

So then, St John Chrysostom here insists that creation "unfolds" continually, and not all at once, which is an antecedent to modern hypotheses regarding *creatio continua*. What Chrysostom here applies to the Son of God, I ascribe to the Spirit of God.

VII. KENOSIS AND CREATION TODAY

The created world is docile before the Spirit, and therefore ever open to his causal influence. The kenosis of the Spirit into creation is purely voluntary, as it is simply the overflowing of the goodness and love of God. God's goodness is forever *pouring out* without running out, as well as *emptying* without getting emptied, and this happens eternally within the uncreated inner life of the Trinity. God reveals his inner Triune life in creating the world thereby. In fact, creation is the first out-flowing of the divine goodness within the Trinity, and God saw that this creation was "very good."⁵² As implicitly derived from the creation of the vast universe, this paper affirms that the action of the Spirit of God knows no limits, for the Spirit is supra-spatial.⁵³ Because of the Spirit's

⁴⁹ Manuel G. Doncel, *The Kenosis of the Creator and of the Created Co-creator*, Zygon, 39, no. 4 (2004): 798.

⁵⁰ Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, 96.

⁵¹ Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Gospel of Saint John and Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 76 (emphasis my own).

⁵² Gen. 1:31.

⁵³ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 276.

kenosis into creation, the *absolute* God is able to establish a relationship with the *relative* creatures, of which humanity is exemplar.

The Spirit was, as it were, “taking a risk” in creating a world kenotically, for it necessarily involves both chance and randomness through the processes of evolution.⁵⁴ However, the Spirit imparted *propensities* into creation that eventuate the rise of information-processing systems, as well as information-storage systems, which were both necessary for the realization of higher forms of life.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Spirit is the very *power of being* this paper posits. Although the Spirit of God’s omnipotence has been *self-limited* in that the Spirit chose freely to give some power over to creation, this does not mean that the Spirit is not capable of doing whatever he wills; instead, it is not in accordance with his nature to insist on total control. So then, the Spirit limits Himself, giving *genuine freedom*, and thus *genuine power*, to that which has been created. It may be deduced, then, that the Spirit created a type of world in which he is not the only agent. Indeed, the Spirit creates entities that are truly “other” than himself, and part of that otherness is *agency*. The Spirit enables creation to *be itself* by bestowing freedom to creation, as well as by enabling creation to *become itself* through bestowing authentic causal powers within material matter. Creation, then, needs to be understood dynamically as a process.

In the kenotic paradigm of the Spirit’s presence in the creation of the world herein presented, one should recognize that Gen. 1 involves the ministerial use of the created order in the forming of other created things. Creation is a series of acts done by the luring Spirit of creation that is done “in time,” as well as a series of acts done by the luring Spirit of creation that “takes time.” Additionally, just as God the Father “took his time” in dealing with an erring world in Christ, so too did he “take his time” in bestowing creative and causal powers to the Spirit in creation. Thus the created world is a project, of sorts, of the Spirit in that the creation takes time to become what it was intended to be.⁵⁶

As God did his work of creating by means of the Spirit, so believers are to do their work by the Spirit.⁵⁷ It may be deduced that the kenosis of the Spirit in the form of *self-limiting* makes possible the kenosis of the Spirit in creation in the form of *self-giving*. Indeed, that which is the fullness of God (i.e. the Spirit) enters into “unfullness” so that the “unfullness” may later be made full. Thus,

⁵⁴ Peacocke, *The Work of Love*, 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁶ Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 93.

⁵⁷ John Sailhamer, “Exegetical Notes: Gen. 1:1–2:4a,” *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984): 82.

the overall purpose of this kenosis by the Creating Spirit into creation is theosis by means of enosis.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ George F. R. Ellis, *The Work of Love*, 109. That is, the purpose of *kenosis* is *theosis*, or union with God, by means of *enosis*, or the infilling by God.