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# **The Kenotic Nature of Everything:**

**Being, Grasping, Not Grasping and Being Grasped**



There is a flow to all reality. Life and death. Spring, summer, fall and winter. Day and night. Planetary orbits. Rain and rivers and evaporation. The inner workings of subatomic particles. Everything is moving and everything is interconnected. Receiving and giving, sustained by the power of Divine Love. Life at its best is constantly in motion. Receiving precedes giving, but that which is received must be allowed to flow outwards in love in confidence that what is needed will be received from Love.

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Before the beginning, always, there was God. And God was not lonely. Love, their very nature, flowed in a never-ending dance between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> But God wanted more, and in the beginning, about 13.8 billion years ago, he spoke and the

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made ...  
John 1: 1-3

universe came into being. Our tiny planet emerged 9.3 billion years later and finally, only 200,000 years ago, a race emerged with whom God could have meaningful fellowship.

## Grasping

The first creation story presents humankind as the pinnacle of God's creation reflecting His own image<sup>2</sup>, while the second tells emphasizes the importance and dignity of human relationship. Eve was cloned from Adam as a "suitable helper" and they became again "one flesh" mirroring the one-and-more-than-one nature of Deity. The Hebrew term "suitable helper" (ezer) is the same word used of God as passages such as Psalm 70:5. So the first humans we made in the image of God, and given authority and capability commensurate with their high calling. How strange and tragic that it was this very promise of being like God<sup>3</sup> -- which they already were -- that was the deception

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Richard Rohr for this image of the Trinity as a flowing dance of love.

<sup>2</sup> "So God created mankind in his own image ... male and female he created them." Genesis 1:26 NIV

<sup>3</sup> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4 - 5

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that the serpent used to cause them to disobey God and grasp for equality of knowledge!

The second creation account highlights the flow of water coming from the ground and separating into four streams. All of biological life is sustained by flows of warmth, and water and air and nutrients. The earth brought forth an abundance of plants for the first humans to eat, and God allowed all of them except one: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was forbidden and, not content to simply receive that which was granted, they willfully disobeyed and ate of the forbidden tree. The result of grasping the forbidden fruit was death -- essentially the cessation of flow. The abundance of the earth became constricted and the flow of love between Adam and Eve distorted by power and submission. No longer was kenosis -- flowing love and nurturing -- the norm. Death passed to all creation.

## **Not Grasping**

Contrary to the modern Western mindset of individualism, Scripture views both God and humanity as collective unities. This is clear in the doctrine of the Trinity as one God but also in the way that all people are seen in being part of Adam's disobedience. St Paul declared to the Corinthians: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."<sup>4</sup>

So let us now turn our attention to Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22 NIV

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In the aftermath of the disobedience, God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head”<sup>5</sup> and, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman.”<sup>6</sup> St Paul declared that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”<sup>7</sup> and the writer to the Hebrews wrote “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus himself told Phillip “Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father.”<sup>9</sup>

In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul stated of Christ that

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

- **Nicene Creed**

“though He was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled

himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:15 NIV

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 4:4 NIV

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 2:9 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 1:3 NIV

<sup>9</sup> John 14:9 NIV

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heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the first humans, Christ, the Son of Man, did not grasp equality with God but freely emptied himself of advantage and took the form of a servant. Any attempt to see the nature of God himself as unlike Jesus is unfounded as “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself”<sup>11</sup>. Yet, Jesus is presented as the Son in relation to the Father. He declared in his servant humanity:,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. ... For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting that in exalting Jesus, the Father has given all judgement to the Son. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines judgment as “the process of forming an opinion or evaluation by discerning and comparing.”<sup>13</sup> Because he did not grasp equality with God but emptied Himself, he was given authority to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge (the determination, even) of Good and Evil.

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<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:5 - 11 ESV

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 ESV

<sup>12</sup> John 5:19 - 23 ESV

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/judgement> 28/10/2017

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“So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord ...” The result of the emptying and exaltation of the Second Person of the Godhead is an emptying of human pride. He is Lord; I am not. But it is not a defeat for humans. Instead, it is a participation in Divine abundance.

## Being Grasped

The decision to gladly acknowledge that Jesus is Lord is a free human choice but the initiative to love is God’s. In this saga of human grasping of Godlikeness, and Jesus’ not grasping of it, there is one final grasping -- the life-giving grasping of us by God for inclusion into the divine dance. Further in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”<sup>14</sup>

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, the letter to the church at Colossae states “For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”<sup>16</sup> Our filling, again, reflects God’s pouring himself into His creation, this time in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>14</sup> Philippians 3:12 NIV

<sup>15</sup> John 1:16 ESV

<sup>16</sup> Collosians 2:9 - 10 ESV

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And so the kenotic flow of Love continues. Our Lord left us with only one instruction: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>17</sup> Or as Paul put it to the Philippians before quoting the great kenotic hymn: “Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”<sup>18</sup> Let love abound!

Word count: 1249

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<sup>17</sup> John 15:12 ESV

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 2:5 NIV