
THE KENOSIS OF THE CREATOR, HIS CREATIVE CALL AND THE CREATED CO-CREATORS

Manuel G. Doncel*

Seminari de Teologia i Ciències de Barcelona, Centre Boja, Llaceres 30, E-08172 Sant Cugat,
Barcelona, Spain

(Received 24 August 2006)

Abstract

In this paper I try to enrich the well known conception of Philip Hefner about the created co-creators with two complementary ideas: the example given by the Creator's kenosis, and a reflection on his 'creative call' through which, according to Karl Schmitz-Moormann, He carries out the continuous creation of our evolutionary world. From those complementary ideas, I draw consequences for the human technology, as a work of created agents and of co-creators at four different levels of the reality: cosmic, interpersonal, eschatological and global.

Keywords: united totality, plus esse, sustainability, diversity

1. Introduction

As stated in a previous paper [1], I consider *human technology* to be an evolutionary moment in our cultural and genetic variation, which becomes theologically decisive from an eschatological perspective. I begin with Philip Hefner's theological program on the human being as the *created co-creator* [2, 3], and will distinguish, in different sections, between the limitations and responsibilities of the human being as a *created agent*, and his possibilities and ideals as a *co-creator*, being 'imago Dei'. I also consider the profound idea of the *Kenosis of the Creator*, which constitutes the very root of His 'love principle', and should then be imitated by created co-creators [2, p. 224, 228, 230]. So, I will previously highlight some aspects of this kenosis as presented by Jürgen Moltmann in relation to creation and eschatology [4-6] - this view of the divine kenosis can clarify God's purpose for the universe and its eternal destiny. But in what follows, I will introduce some new ideas of teilhardian origin, which were elaborated by Karl Schmitz-Moormann. These emerge from the study of the evolutionary mode of God's creation under the metaphysics of becoming through union [7]. And these are crowned by the profound view of God's continuous creation as a *creatio appellata*, a creative call, inviting creatures to ontologically approach Him in increasing measures in His trinitarian union.

* e-mail: manuel.g.doncel@uab.es

2. The kenosis of the Creator, its elements and its cessation

The Christian idea of *kenosis* is grounded in a verse of a New Testament hymn (Philippians 2.7), and has been traditionally applied to the incarnated Logos. But, under the Jewish influence of the mystical *zimzum*, kenosis is now also applied in Christian theology to the Creator. This leads to a change of emphasis in the concept of God: from ‘absolute power’ to ‘absolute love’. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, such a kenosis (characteristic of any true love) should be presupposed in the eternal love relationship of the divine Persons [8]. What we consider in Creation or Incarnation is a manifestation of this internal kenosis in God’s external relationship with creatures, which add its vulnerable nature to kenosis.

We can imagine the kenosis of the Creator as a ‘self-restriction’ in His divine being, freely fulfilled in loving respect for the creatures to be created, in order to offer them metaphysical play, to exist and to act as autonomous created beings. We specifically conceive that the triune God, ‘before’ His decision to create the universe, freely accepted to be ‘no longer’ the only ‘sufficient condition’ of every particular effect. When deciding upon a universe of physical and free personal creatures, the kenosis of the Creator embodied a variety of elements to be indicated.

2.1. *Space-time and the laws of nature*

By deciding to create a bodily and temporal universe, God as eternal and omnipresent restrained Godself in order to allow creation to exist, thereby giving it time and providing it with a habitat of its own, but remaining in true contact with it. Theologians say today that God freely became *temporal*, entering co-created time. And if they think of the world as having expanded from an initial Big Bang, they consider God’s omnipresence to have increased over a span of 13 to 15 billion years to distances of as many light years. Our cosmological and evolutionary models are based on the physical and biological laws discovered by modern science. These include an element of chance, especially in the mechanisms of genetic mutation.

2.2. *Human freedom and world autonomy*

The most momentous element of the kenosis of the Creator is related to free human actions. Respect for this freedom requires God to allow *moral evil* or *sin* (i.e. to allow creatures to react against the divine will). Denis Edwards makes this point when he considers real freedom in the triune God, the freedom to enter into love, to risk oneself with another [9, 10]. On the other hand, John Polkinghorne draws a parallel between the ‘free wills’ of human agents and the ‘autonomous processes’ of the world regulated by natural laws. Thus, he considers a new element of the kenosis of the Creator, the fact that God allows

the autonomous course of such world processes. This may shed new light on the problem of *physical evil*.

2.3. *Eschatological cessation of God's kenosis*

According to Moltmann, this kenosis is transitory [5, p. 328; 6, p. 294]. It began at the *primordial moment* of God's creative resolve, with a divine *self-restriction*; it will cease at the *eschatological moment* of God's redemptive resolve, with a divine *de-restriction* of self. This de-restriction supplies the glorious manifestation to the Creation, of God's being 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15.28). Then it will 'no longer' be neither space and time proper, nor death and sin, but interpersonal loving of the created and Trinitarian persons. In this interpersonal life without evil and death, our laws of nature must also cease. Our 'spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15.44) can no longer obey such physicochemical and bioevolutionary laws, on pain of producing death again.

2.4. *God's purpose: to build free persons for eternal lives of love*

The essence of the trinitarian God is love, which is exchanged between the divine Persons in an eternal *perichoresis* ('circumincession', intercommunication). The new application of the divine kenosis intends to introduce a whole world of created persons within the personal being of God, amounting to an extended *perichoresis* of sorts. Such creatures should be built with respectful tact, so that they become persons, and they should also experience restoration from disorders. This kenosis of a vulnerable nature will come to an end, together with every physical and moral evil, when these personal creatures are consecrated in indefectible love and living in interpersonal communication with God.

3. The creative call and the metaphysics of union

Biblical 'fiat lux' has already presented the creation as a call, a creative word. But, as Karl Schmitz-Moormann shows, the study of cosmobioevolution uncovers a continuous creation [7, p. 29]. We can no longer distinguish a first stage of putting one thing in existence (that "God saw how good it was") from further stages of conserving and improving it. All such things have an internal dynamism, and are in a becoming that is sometimes highly progressive (and God saw how good it is). The divine creative call is an eternal and continuous call for the whole of natural creation, and imbricates the different times and spaces of things together with their becoming [7, p. 121]. The only thing that we must conceive as logically previous to this eternal call is the kenotic self-restriction of God, delivering the ontically empty room to which the call is addressed. And the continuous call to approach divine plenitude is filling this primordial room with our huge universe in expansion and maturation, in some corners of which beings

are flourishing and becoming more and more perfect structures, nearer and nearer to the ontic richness of the calling triune God.

According to Karl Rahner and his view of 'dynamic self-transcendence', in this process of cosmobioevolution God does not need to exert 'categorical' actions within the world, but only to supply the 'transcendental' action, generally maintaining the world in its existence and proper activity. This is sufficient to explain the continuous emergence of a new richness of being. Because of the kinship of matter and spirit, this may even be applied to the 'hominization' or emergence of human, spiritual beings [11, p. 79]. Recent theologians emphasize this view of causality as self-transcendence, and see its divine dynamism as life-giving work of the Holy Spirit [9, p. 90; 10, p. 33 & 105]. Thus, the Creator totally respects the autonomy of cosmobioevolution as an element of His free kenosis. On the other hand, the metaphysics of union enunciated by Pierre Teilhard (*plus esse = plus a pluribus uniri*) demands that this richer becoming be made by the union of elements in more and more complex totalities with union binding more and more richly [7, p. 45]. Let us look at this in more detail.

3.1. United totalities with physical or biological binding

The Big Bang model describes the formation of successive totalities that are dynamically united in the subatomic, atomic and molecular worlds [7, p. 41]: proton and neutron (three 'quarks' bound by 'nuclear strong' interaction, or continuous interchange of 'gluons'), atomic nucleus (more and more protons and neutrons with the same binding), atom (one nucleus clothed with electrons, bound to it by electromagnetic interaction, or continuous interchange of photons), molecule and macromolecule (more and more atoms with different kinds of chemical binding, which are also electromagnetic). Evolutionary cell biology describes prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells as more and more complex ensembles of molecules and macromolecules, which are limited by one or several membranes and maintain a mysterious cell unity through different biochemical dynamisms. Evolutionary zoology describes more and more complex pluricellular organisms with different cell textures and organs, which are limited by skin integuments and united by more and more complex neuronal systems. This series culminates in the human being, with highly complex encephalon, reflex conscience, freedom and personal character.

3.2. United totalities with interpersonal binding

According to modern neurosciences, sociality constitutes a profound character of human personality. For Teilhard de Chardin the evolutionary process continues within the noosphere in a 'socialization' [12]. According to him, this process will enrich and diversify personalities (as the formation of pluricellular organisms has enriched cell diversity). We have good knowledge of natural united totalities that have arisen at this further level: matrimony, family,

guild, village, nation, union of states... These are the basis of our cultural and technical evolution. The new types of binding for such totalities can be stronger or weaker: familiar, of coexistence or neighbourhood, legal, economical... But the strongest ones are those based on a deep interpersonal binding, especially those of true friendship and love. Thus, interpersonal united totalities with strong love binding appear at the top of our process of cosmobioevolution.

3.3. Divine persons and supernatural human life

Our Christian faith tells us of an interpersonal Trinity, in which divine Persons are exclusively distinguished by their mutual relationships (in consonance with modern psychology and neurosciences of human persons). This plurality of divine Persons allows for God to 'really be love'. So, analogically extending the concept of 'united totality' inside our metaphysics of union (as the concept of 'being' is analogically extended inside the metaphysics of being), we may correctly state that: "the Trinity is the highest united Totality". The approach of the creative call constitutes all such created totalities in 'vestiges' of the Trinity, and human beings in 'images' of Him ('imago Dei'), able to establish contact with Him ('capax Dei'). What is more, our Christian hope tells us of a special, supernatural call to live together as adoptive children with this interpersonal Reality ('to see Him face to face'). And, for this goal, theology tells us of an elevation through a special grace, which insofar as it is 'uncreated grace' is the presence in ourselves of the Holy Spirit, as guaranty and anticipation. In his 'koinonia' function, He is already preparing humanity for this interpersonal meeting with the Trinity. He, who is the binding of love union within the Trinity, will extend his function in an 'extended perichoresis' of sorts.

3.4. God's purpose for the creation: invitation to the wedding feast in the kingdom of heaven

This image of the creative call followed by the elevating call underlines certain aspects that complement those of kenotic self-restriction concluded with eschatological de-restriction. First, it underlines the divine transcendence and power. Only the triune God can utter the creative call, as the initiative and 'first Cause' of creation. It underlines the meaning of creation, as the first act of the divine grandiose opera, to be completed by the following acts at the highest level of salvific elevation. Together with the difference of acts, it underlines the continuity of movement yielded by the same divine goodness and power. On the other hand, both images combine perfectly. The call, to be authentic, must be addressed to an 'other', and God's otherness presupposes His free self-restriction. The elevating call also requires a personal and responsible 'other', whose building presupposes these long stages of human evolution in a habitat that is sufficiently autonomous of the divine tutelage. And only in the eschatological consummation of this invitational call, will the definitive union arrive that Denis Edwards imagines as a never-ending dance: "My image is that

of the dance of the universe, a dance led by the trinitarian persons in ever new improvisations, which touch each creature and embrace the whole, which respect freedom and the structure of all that is, and which open out onto what is radically new.” [13]

4. The created agent under God’s kenosis and the creative call

If God works kenotically on the creation, we the ‘techno sapiens’ should do so all the more. We feel ourselves to be *created agents* (contingent, flawed and causing evil and vulnerability). As created, we are submitted to the general creative call, which only God, as the first cause, may address to the process of cosmobiorevolution, ‘after’ establishing its laws. So, we are *conditioned* in all respects: in the ecosystem in which we emerged, in the genome and culture we inherited and in the very recent human group to which we belong. Let us therefore think about our limitations as human technicians, also from our three perspectives (the physical, the personal and the eschatological).

4.1. Technical limitations and sustainability

Our first limitations are related with space-time. In spite of the growing speed of our communication and transmission techniques, our space dimensions are still planetary, practically the same as those of the ‘homo erectus’, wandering from continent to continent. We have increased the rapidity of electronic computation and mass production, but the time span we personally dispose for a technology project is reduced to very few decades of our active life. We are dependent upon our culture, and upon the programs that past generations conceived and transmitted to us. This should remind us of our reciprocal obligation to future generations. Other limitations on a planetary scale involve raw materials and energy.

4.2. Economic exploitation of human rights and ecological ‘rights’

Having been created rational and free, we feel (under the creative call) responsible for and obliged to respect the rights and well-being of our human group. But there is actually far less altruism toward our genetic and cultural group than there should be. Our belonging to the human group bestows upon us special obligations towards our whole ecosystem. We should consider, not only human, but also ecological ‘rights’, grounded in our *kinship* within our evolutionary process. Solid reasons for caution when interfering with the ecosystem are, in my opinion, our ignorance of ‘the consequences of such interference in other areas’, and respect for ‘the well-being of future generations’.

4.3. *Transitory nature of our technical enterprises*

As previously discussed, our laws of physics and biology cease at the end of time. Our technology, founded upon them, must then also be transitory. Such an assessment should not lead us to a kind of disdain regarding our technical enterprises and their progress. The eschatological *new creation* will not be ‘ex nihilo’ (‘out of nothing’) like the original creation, but ‘ex vetere [creatione]’ (‘out of the old creation’) in which we now live. Thus, the dimension of eternity is introduced to our technical activity, particularly if that activity is guided by the love principle. For instance, solidarity with the third world in order to find ways of sharing well-being will surely deserve eternal value (Mathew 25.35-36).

4.4. *No terrestrial utopia, but world autonomy and eschatological stimulus*

Christian hope for an eternal utopia, deeply rooted in faith in the resurrected Christ, is not a terrestrial hope. Our technical activity, although performed in the autonomous world that God’s kenosis rendered possible, is efficacious only in so far as it is supported by God’s transcendental action (included in His creative call to humans) and is aimed towards our final goal. The Vatican II Council, after acknowledging the rightful autonomy of the human, social and scientific world, considers human activity in this eschatological perspective and exhorts: “Still our hopes of a new world should not lessen but stimulate our anxiety to improve the present world, where the new family is taking shape”.

5. The co-creator under God’s kenosis and the creative call

The mission we (as God’s image) receive from Him with the personal call should imitate His kenotic style. Our kenosis is an expression of the love principle and should also mark all human and technological activity as co-creators. We have, in the past, misunderstood the biblical text about our dominion on the world (Genesis 1.28), because of our misled idea of God and God’s dominion. We should learn from God’s lovingly self-restricting respect to all creatures, and so follow His mission: “cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden” (Genesis 2.15). In our ecological age, this means care ‘for the whole earth’, this very complex system of systems, on which our future generations depend.

5.1. *Need to master and co-steer the world’s evolution*

To follow our co-steering mission (included in our personal call) we should strive to understand the mysteries of nature, i.e. the as yet unknown laws that govern the world and that created agents can only obey. This scientific research should include cosmology, molecular biology and neuroscience insofar as we consider them competent in describing genetic-cultural evolution. Only by

strict attention to these laws of the evolving world can we steer it in such a way for our planet to be hospitably preserved for all its inhabitants. If that proves impossible, we should steer the flight of all humankind to a more hospitable planet. Such are the thoughts we consider today as survival strategies for our future generations.

5.2. Universal 'love principle' and the 'rights' of the world's cultures

The 'love principle' must begin by loving the neighbour 'whom we see'. But in our world of Internet and television, all nations of the planet are our neighbours, and also future generations on earth. The central point of our personal mission is to develop human and social dimensions through steering our cultures. Genetically, we are a single species, but culturally we are a plurality of contradictory cultures. We should defend each of them and their biodiversity by establishing the 'rights of the culture', not only those of the individual person. The universality of the love principle should embrace any 'human' culture and all of its positive values, despite the threats that a unification of cultures may create.

5.3. Eschaton and the globalisation of cultures

The eschatological concept of 'the kingdom of God' and related biblical images point to a 'home of God', which is unified by free interpersonal connection. The current dynamism of unification, however, will lead to certain hybridisation of cultures, regulated in the new spirit of natural (human) selection. Through successive processes of hybridisation, a global culture of techno-sapiens will begin to emerge. These processes should be inspired not by biased and wicked interests but by a truly geographical-historical love principle. According to this, global technology should produce organismic solidarity, and kenotically try to acknowledge and enrich the lifestyles of all members of the world society.

5.4. Collaborating with the Logos and the Spirit.

The last three subsections (again from their physical, personal and eschatological perspectives) help us to think about the realization of our personal mission as co-creators in God's kenotic style. The final goal should be to collaborate in the preparation of this home of God with the Logos and the Spirit. The function of designing created persons for this home belongs to the Logos who, being incarnated, perfectly achieved this design as the 'definitive Adam'. The function of their restoration belongs to the Holy Spirit who, re-establishing the interpersonal 'koinonia' ('communion'), prepares the personal world for the eschatological assumption in this trinitarian God [14].

References

- [1] M.G. Doncel, *Zygon*, **39** (2004) 791.
- [2] P. Hefner, *The evolution of the Created Co-Creator*, in *Cosmos as Creation*, T. Peters (ed.), Abingdon, Nashville, 1989, 211.
- [3] P. Hefner, *Technology and Human Becoming*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2003.
- [4] J. Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, English version, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1993, 86.
- [5] J. Moltmann, *Der weg Jesuchristi*, English version, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1993.
- [6] J. Moltmann, *Der kommende Got*, English version, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1996, 292.
- [7] K. Schmitz-Moormann, *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World*, Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, 1997.
- [8] H.U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, in *Mysterium Salutis III*, Benzinger, Einsiedeln, 1969, 4.
- [9] D. Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999.
- [10] D. Edwards, *Breath of life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004.
- [11] K. Rahner, *Die Hominisation als theologische Frage*, in *Das Problem der Hominisation*, Paul Overhage & Karl Rahner, Herder, Freiburg, 1961.
- [12] P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène Humain*, Seuil, Paris, 1955, 289 & 338.
- [13] D. Edwards, *The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity*, in *Chaos and Complexity*, R.J. Russell, N. Murphy and A.R. Peacocke (eds.), Vatican Observatory, Vatican City, and CTNS, Berkeley, 1995, 175.
- [14] M.G. Doncel, *The World as Design-Realiser for the Creation, and the Spirit as Disorder-Restorer for the New Creation*, in *ESSSAT Yearbook - Studies in Science & Theology*, N.H. Gregersen, U. Gorman and H. Meisinger (eds.), vol. 8, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, 2002, 43.