

**O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is**  
*Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676); tr. composite*

O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is  
My paradise at which my soul reclineth.  
For there, O Lord, doth lie the Word  
Made flesh for us; herein Thy grace forthshineth.

He whom the sea and wind obey  
Doth come to serve the sinner in great meekness.  
Thou, God's own Son, with us art one,  
Dost join us and our children in our weakness.

Thy light and grace our guilt efface,  
Thy heavenly riches all our loss retrieving.  
Immanuel, Thy birth doth quell  
The power of hell and Satan's bold deceiving.

Thou Christian heart, whoe'er thou art,  
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move thee!  
For God's own Child, in mercy mild,  
Joins thee to Him; how greatly God must love thee!

Remember thou what glory now  
The Lord prepared thee for all earthly sadness.  
The angel host can never boast  
Of greater glory, greater bliss or gladness.

The world may hold her wealth and gold;  
But thou, my heart, keep Christ as thy true Treasure.  
To Him hold fast until at last  
A crown be thine and honor in full measure.



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## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Immanent and Economic**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

Christian orthodoxy affirms the deity of Christ as a fundamental of the faith. The first five verses of John 17 seem to challenge that commitment in several ways. They describe the Son (Jesus Christ) in ways that appear to mark Him as subordinate to the Father. These verses state that the Father has given authority to the Son (v 2), sent Him (v 3), and given Him a work to do (v 4). Rightly understood, however, these claims do not contradict other teaching that names the Son as God (John 1:1; 8:58). Instead, such claims open a window into the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

From the time of Athanasius onward, theologians have commonly drawn a distinction between how the persons of the Trinity relate to each other in the eternal being of God versus how they relate to each other in carrying out God's plan for the world. Athanasius called the former relationship *kata theologia*, or "according to divinity." The latter he called *kata oikonomia*, or "according to arrangement." Theologians continue to speak about the economic Trinity when they want to designate the relationship that the divine persons assume in creation, redemption, and consummation. What Athanasius called the Trinity *kata theologia*, more recent theologians call the *immanent* or *ontological* Trinity.

Every statement that humans can make about Jesus Christ has to be made from one or the other of these perspectives (and sometimes from both). In carrying out the divine plan He made all things (John 1:3; Col 1:16), assumed a human nature (John 1:14), died on the cross for our sins (John 19:23–30), arose from the dead (John 20:1–31), ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9–11), and intercedes for His saints (Heb 4:14–16). Yet the divine Son was also the *Adonai* and the *Jehovah Tsabaoth* who appeared to Isaiah, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up in the heavenly temple (Isa 6:1–4; see John 12:37–41).

This distinction between the ontological and economic Trinity provides a general rule that Christians have used for interpreting different passages that talk about the Son. Whenever the Bible presents the Son as somehow subordinate to the Father, it is talking about His economic role within God's plan. When the Bible speaks of the Son in His deity and eternity, it is speaking about His ontological standing. Thus, when John 17 says that the Father

has given authority to the Son (2), sent the Son (3), and given the Son a work to do (4), these activities occur within the administration that the divine persons have assumed for the execution of God's plan. They do not make a statement about who Jesus is *in Himself*, but about who He is *in the role that He has assumed* for our creation and redemption.

So far, so good—but more needs to be said, and it needs to be said on both the ontological and the economic sides. Further distinctions must be drawn. On the economic side, the great distinction is between Christ's humiliation and His glorification, both of which are stages within the divine administration. The key text for understanding this distinction is Philippians 2:5–11, sometimes called the *kenosis passage*.

In this passage, Paul first observes that, prior to His incarnation, Christ subsisted (*huparchōn*) in the form of God. This is a description of the eternal status of Christ as He is in Himself. Christ fully participated in the divine glory, as can be seen in the above reference to Isaiah 6. The glory was not merely the Father's, but also the Son's. That He was equal with the Father was visibly evident, yet He did not consider this visible equality with God to be a *harpagmos*—a thing to be selfishly grasped. In a word, He denied Himself the rightful privileges and honors that were His from eternity.

Instead of clinging to His visible equality with God, the Son took two additional steps in carrying out the plan of God. The first was to empty Himself, and the second was to humble Himself. These three concepts—that Christ denied Himself, emptied Himself, and humbled Himself—describe stages in the economic role He assumed for the execution of God's plan.

These stages, and particularly the self-emptying, indicate a further distinction that must be drawn. One aspect of His self-emptying is that He took the form of a slave. In other words, He submitted Himself to His Father in abject obedience (see Heb 10:7). In doing so, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on the cross.

Obviously, He has not remained dead. He is now risen and glorified. His relationship to the Father is no longer one of abject obedience. In other words, the humiliation of Christ, assumed as a stage in the outworking of the plan of redemption, was a temporary condition. The succeeding verses make this clear: God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name. The humiliation was a stage of the Son's economic relationship to the Father, but it was not the entirety of that relationship.

To say that God has exalted Him and given Him a name above every name is also a statement about the economic relationship. The exaltation that the Father now grants the Son is not the eternal glory that the Son has in Himself, but the glory of an exalted human nature. In His self-emptying, the Son (who already existed) also came to be in human likeness (Phil 2:7). He did

not abandon His divine nature or His divine attributes, but He assumed a complete and genuine human nature. He became incarnate.

This incarnation will never be dissolved. The eternal Son is forevermore a human being, two natures united in one person. The two natures are distinct and must not be confounded, but the person is indivisible. In no sense does the incarnation lower or degrade the deity of the Son, but it does dignify the human.

The humiliation would have been impossible without the incarnation, but the two are not equivalent. The Son was humiliated and is now exalted. He became incarnate to endure humiliation, but He remains incarnate to enjoy exaltation. Though both are aspects of the Son's economic relationship to the Father, one was a temporary condition while the other will endure forever.

The Second Person of the Godhead is eternally and ontologically God the Son. He is also economically the incarnate Son who was crucified. Some statements about Him pertain to His standing as God in Himself. Some pertain to His standing as a genuine human being, an enduring aspect of His economic role. Some pertain to His humiliation, a temporary aspect of His economic role. These are necessary distinctions.

At least one other distinction is necessary as well, and that is a distinction that must be drawn on the ontological side. To that distinction we shall turn at some future point.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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