

AS OINTMENT EMPTIED OUT: ORIGEN AND INTRATRINITARIAN KENOSIS

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“[T]he kenosis itself is wrapped within the Son’s
identity as image of the Father’s substance.”



In the final chapter of *Fides et ratio*, titled “Current Requirements and Tasks,” John Paul II describes “contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God” as “the very heart of theological enquiry”:

The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death, a mystery issuing into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the Father, whence he would send the Spirit of truth to bring his Church to birth and give her growth. From this vantage-point, the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God’s *kenosis*, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return. In this light, a careful analysis of texts emerges as a basic and urgent need: first the texts of Scripture, and then those which express the Church’s living Tradition. On

this score, some problems have emerged in recent times, problems which are only partially new.¹

As suggested by these words, the theme of Christ's kenosis as a revelation of the trinitarian processions has emerged as a key disputed question in recent trinitarian theology. In Philippians 2:6–7, Paul teaches that Jesus Christ, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” What is the relationship between this mystery of the kenosis or self-emptying of Christ and the eternal life of the Trinity? Is there an analogy between the Son's kenosis in the Incarnation and the Father's eternal generation of the Son?

In the modern era, Hegel first introduced the notion of an intratrinitarian kenosis.² In the twentieth century, Sergius Bulgakov³ and Hans Urs von Balthasar⁴ sought to refute and surpass Hegel while confirming the importance of kenosis for an analogical approach to the mystery of God as triune love.⁵ “The

1. *Fides et ratio*, 93.

2. See Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* speaking of (essentially) the immanent Trinity: “The essence intuits only itself in its being-for-itself; in this self-relinquishing [*Entäußerung*], it is only at one with itself, is the being-for-itself which excludes itself from the essence, is the *essence's knowing of itself*” (trans. Terry Pinkard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 441, §770). What Pinkard translates as “self-relinquishing” is the same term used in the Lutherbibel translation of Philippians 2:7 (*entäußerte*). On Hegel's use of intratrinitarian kenosis, see Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 132–33.

3. See, e.g., Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 98ff.

4. See, e.g., Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols, OP (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 27–36; *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 84, 243. On Balthasar's borrowings from Bulgakov on the subject, see Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 185–94.

5. For some of Bulgakov's most direct engagement with Hegel, see his *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)*, trans. Stephen Churchyard (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2020), 51–64, 171–205. On Balthasar's thoroughgoing negotiation with Hegel, see Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1: *Hegel*

ultimate presupposition of the Kenosis,” Balthasar writes, “is the ‘selflessness’ of the Persons in the intra-trinitarian life of love.”⁶ More recently, this notion of intratrinitarian kenosis or *Ur-kenosis* has been criticized from a more scholastic, and specifically Thomist, perspective.⁷ Other theologians have defended the idea that Christ’s kenotic love is grounded in and expresses his eternal sonship.⁸ The question is treated with great frequency, though often in an exclusively speculative mode. This essay will explore the historical question of whether there is patristic precedent for the modern idea that the Father’s eternal generation of the Son constitutes an *Ur-kenosis* that grounds the Son’s kenosis in time.

Specifically, we will turn to Origen of Alexandria, the first Christian theologian to make significant use of the language of kenosis.⁹ Origen, living long before the notion

(New York: Crossroad, 2014), esp. 165–69, 229–33 on the differences between Balthasar and Hegel on kenosis.

6. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 35.

7. Most recently, Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 588–98. Cf. Thomas Joseph White, OP, “Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology,” *Nova et Vetera* 6, no. 2 (2008): 377–402. Bruce Marshall has also been highly critical of modern trinitarian theology, often in relation to its ideas of trinitarian kenosis: see his “Personal Distinction in God and the Possibility of Kenosis,” *Angelicum* 98, no. 1 (2021): 65–104; “The Unity of the Triune God: Reviving an Ancient Question,” *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 1–32. Much of the problematic relates to the reception of Hegel, of which both Marshall and Guy Mansini have been especially critical. See Bruce Marshall, “The Absolute and the Trinity,” *Pro Ecclesia* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 147–64; Guy Mansini, “Hegel and Christian Theology,” *Nova et Vetera* 14 (2016): 993–1001.

8. See principally John Betz, “The Humility of God: On a Disputed Question in Trinitarian Theology,” *Nova et Vetera* 17, no. 3 (2019): 769–810. For a qualified defense of the notion within certain boundaries, see Kenneth Oakes, “Gathering Many Likenesses: Trinity and Kenosis,” *Nova et Vetera* 17, no. 3 (2019): 871–91.

9. The most thorough study of kenosis in patristic literature is Michael Magree, SJ, “‘Shaped to the Measure of the Kenosis’: The Theological Interpretation of Philippians 2:7 from Origen to Cyril of Alexandria” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019). On Origen, whose frequency of use of kenosis language is surpassed only by Cyril of Alexandria, see *ibid.*, 100–51. See also Gerald Bostock, “Origen’s Exegesis of the Kenosis Hymn (Philippians 2:5–11),” in *Origeniana Sexta: Origen and the Bible* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1995), 531–47; John McGuckin, “Origen of Alexandria on the Kenosis of the Lord,” in *Kenosis: The Self-Emptying of Christ in Scripture and Theology*, ed. Paul Nimmo and Keith Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 77–96.

of intratrinitarian kenosis entered the realm of theological debate, naturally says nothing of it directly. Nevertheless, we can examine Origen's Christology in relation to his trinitarian theology and ask whether and how what Origen says about the Son's kenosis might serve as the basis for an intelligible description of the Father's act of generation in kenotic terms. In the course of our investigation, we will come to see why Origen, together with all thinkers of this era, never described the intratrinitarian acts in kenotic terms: for Origen, kenosis signifies diminishment, limitation, and change of condition *per definitionem*—terms that have no utility in describing the divine life *ad intra*. Nevertheless, we will also uncover a striking likeness in his thought between the Father's begetting of the Son and the Son's self-emptying. Origen presents the latter as the act in which the Son, without alteration to his divine nature, pours his divine being into the humanity of Christ and thereby becomes image of the Father, whose being is characterized by his self-outpouring into the Son. Based on the emanationist and expressivist hues with which he colors the Son's kenosis, Origen allows us to view the Father's generation of the Son as the intratrinitarian ground for the Son's self-emptying in the Incarnation, and thus in some sense an *Ur-kenosis*.

One of Origen's most striking statements about the Son's kenosis comes from the first book of *De principiis*: “[The Son's] desire was by means of this very emptying to display to us the fullness of the godhead.”¹⁰ In this chapter, Origen has been treating the Son's eternal procession from the Father, focusing on his divine being as the Word and Wisdom of the Father. Origen presents a great deal in these sections, the most relevant of which is his understanding of the Word as the interpreter and revealer of the Father. This is central to what Brian Daley calls Origen's “Christology of divine epiphany” or “Christology of manifestation.”¹¹ As Wisdom, which for Origen is the most

10. Origen, *De principiis* 1.2.8, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 29 (hereafter cited as *De prin.*).

11. See Brian Daley, SJ, “Irenaeus and Origen: A Christology of Divine Manifestation,” in *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 65–93, and 83ff. on Origen.

fundamental of Christ's titles,¹² Christ "opens to all other beings . . . the meaning of the mysteries and secrets which are contained within the wisdom of God"; as Word, he is the interpreter of the mind's (i.e., the Father's) secrets.¹³ As Wisdom and Word, then, Christ has knowledge of the Father and communicates and interprets that knowledge to the rest of creation. Origen goes on to present Christ as truth vis-à-vis the Father—as the one who knows and contains the Father's truth—and as image vis-à-vis us, to whom he reveals the Father.¹⁴ In the next section, Origen moves to the scriptural image of light and brightness, which depicts the Son as the one who lightens the whole creation and renders it capable of enduring the glory of the light.¹⁵

Although Origen here focuses more on the Son's identity as begotten of the Father than on the Father's act of generation itself, it is important to consider how the former relates to the latter. Just as Origen understands the Son as the revealer of the Father's being, so he understands the Father as first communicating that being to the Son in his eternal begetting. This is logically implied by expressivist images like mind/word and light/brightness; Origen considers the subject explicitly when he speaks of the Son as the image of the invisible God.¹⁶ He relates this language of image to the language of Father and Son, showing that the Son/image must preserve the unity of nature and substance of the Father in his birth from the Father.¹⁷ Again, Origen does not focus as much on the Father and the Father's act of generation as on the meaning of these images in relation to the Son. Nevertheless, these images imply something about the Father's character: they present the Father as the one who communicates his own nature, as a father gives his nature to his son

12. See Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 1.118, where he describes Wisdom as "older than all the concepts in the names of the firstborn of all creation" (trans. Ronald Heine [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989], vol. 1, p. 58 [hereafter cited as *Comm. Jn.*]).

13. *De prin.* 1.2.3 (p. 23); cf. *Comm. Jn.* 1.277 (vol. 1, p. 91).

14. *De prin.* 1.2.6 (p. 27).

15. *De prin.* 1.2.7 (p. 28).

16. See *De prin.* 1.2.6 (p. 25–27).

17. See *De prin.* 1.2.6 (p. 26): "This image preserves the unity of nature and substance common to a father and a son." Cf. *De prin.* 4.4.1.

and as light shines forth its brightness. Origen's approach is fairly apophatic with respect to the Father's act of generation; however, he is willing to complement the natural-paternal imagery of father and son with the psychological terms of mind and will, using the former to accentuate the unity of nature and the latter to accentuate the indivisibility and incorporeality of the generation.¹⁸ What these images have in common is their generative/productive nature: as mind produces an act of will that remains within itself, so a father generates a son who contains his same nature. In a word, Origen presents the Father's act in *emanationist* terms, seeing it as a productive movement intrinsic to the Father's very being.¹⁹ Having reframed Origen's presentation in this way, we can see how the Son's identity relates to the Father's: as the Son is the revealer and expresser of the Father, so the Father is one who naturally and eternally communicates his nature and substance to the Son.²⁰ The respective identities of Father and Son are equally tied to their making known the divine reality.²¹ Although Origen does not pause to frame the matter in this way, it is important for our purposes to do so, because it will allow us to see how the Son's act of self-emptying relates to the Father's act of generation.

All these considerations bring us to the section in which Origen first speaks of the Son's kenosis and Incarnation, specifically as he interprets the meaning of the title "image of God's substance" (Heb 1:3).²² This section stands out not only because it treats our subject explicitly but also because Origen here subtly changes his mode of expression. Previously he had spoken of how Christ *is* the Word, Wisdom, image of the invisible God, etc.; here he speaks of how Christ *becomes* the image of the Father's substance:

18. See *De prin.* 1.2.6 (pp. 26–27).

19. Origen specifically describes the Son's birth as an emanation in *De prin.* 1.2.5 (p. 25) and 1.2.10 (p. 31).

20. On the eternity of this generation, see *De prin.* 1.2.2 (p. 21–22), 4.4.1 (p. 417–19).

21. On the mutuality of knowledge between Father and Son, see *De prin.* 1.1.8 (pp. 17–18).

22. See *De prin.* 1.2.8 (pp. 28–30).

In order, however, to understand still more completely how the Savior is “the image of God’s substance” or subsistence, let us use an illustration which, although it does not fully or properly represent the subject under discussion, we may yet be allowed to employ for the sole purpose of showing that when the Son, “who was in the form of God, emptied himself,” his desire was by means of this very emptying to display to us the fullness of the godhead. Let us suppose, for example, that there existed a statue of so great a size as to fill the whole world, but which on account of its immensity was imperceptible to anyone, and that another statue was made similar to it in every detail, in shape of limbs and outline of features, in form and material, but not in its immense size, so that those who were unable to perceive and behold the immense one could yet be confident that they had seen it when they saw the small one, because this preserved every line of limbs and features and the very form and material with an absolutely indistinguishable similarity. It is by some such likeness as this that the Son, in emptying himself of his equality with the Father and showing to us a way by which we may know him, becomes “an express image” of God’s substance.²³

Most basically, this passage indicates that for Origen the Son’s self-emptying is the means by which he fulfills his identity as revealer of the Father. By this act, he displays the fullness of the godhead (i.e., essence) and opens for humanity a way by which to know him—tasks that, as we mentioned above, define his identity as the Son of the Father.²⁴ Although Origen does not here materially define kenosis, he at least formally defines it as the act by which the Son makes the Father known, and more specifically as the act by which the Son becomes the image of the Father’s substance. It is at this point that our previous consideration of the Father’s identity in relation to the Son becomes important. Here again Origen is focused on the Son as the image of the Father’s substance more than on the Father’s substance as imaged by the Son. Nevertheless, based on our previous considerations we can see why it is at this moment that Origen chooses to speak of the

23. *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 29).

24. McGuckin especially focuses on this revelatory and pedagogical aspect of the Son’s kenosis in “Origen of Alexandria on the Kenosis of the Lord,” 77–96.

Son becoming the image of the Father's substance: namely, because the Father's substance (i.e., his reality as God the Father) is defined by the act of self-communication in which he generates and makes himself known to the Son. And it is precisely this reality that the Son's kenosis images: the self-emptying of the Son is his way of making his godhead known to humanity. This passage therefore justifies the proposition (even if Origen himself does not make it) of a certain proportionality between the Father's generation of the Son and the Son's self-emptying: the Son's kenosis is to his identity as Son what the Father's emanation of the Son is to his identity as Father. This proportionality asserts a certain functional similarity between the Father's generation and the Son's self-emptying, as both accomplish the same end of expressing the divine substance.

That kenosis might bear a deeper material similarity to the Father's generation is suggested by Origen's phrasing in the passage above—"by this very emptying [*per ipsam sui exinanitionem*] to display to us the fullness of the godhead."²⁵ That intensive *ipsam* suggests that the kenosis itself is wrapped within the Son's identity as image of the Father's substance, and not simply a means by which he becomes image of the Father's substance. If this phraseology were a standalone moment in Origen's corpus, then we would have to leave this suggestion as a mere suggestion. Crucially, however, a more forceful passage in Origen's *Commentary on John* speaks similarly:

For we must dare say that the goodness of Christ appeared greater and more divine and truly in accordance with the image of the Father when "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross," than when "he had considered being equal to God robbery," and had not been willing to become a servant for the salvation of the world.²⁶

In this passage, Origen argues that the Son more aptly displays his divine goodness and his concurrence with the Father's image

25. *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 29). Latin text in *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, ed. Herwig Görgemanns and Heinrich Karpp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985).

26. *Comm. Jn.* 1.231 (vol. 1, p. 80).

when he humbles himself. However deeply Origen employs the lexicon of Philippians 2 in this passage, he does not actually use the language of kenosis. This raises the question whether we are justified in using this passage in our treatment of Origen's understanding of kenosis. Although a certain amount of caution should be exercised for this reason, there are two reasons why we are justified in supplying the language of kenosis in our interpretation of this passage. First, it clearly converges with the previous passage in *De principiis* concerning the Son's self-emptying, as both employ the language of Philippians 2 to describe the Son as the image of the Father or the Father's substance. It makes sense to read these passages together and supply the language of kenosis, which is missing from the latter. Second, Origen is one of the few patristic thinkers to employ freely the language of kenosis, and thus we do not need to exercise the same amount of caution that we would need to treat other figures.²⁷ The frequency and liberality with which Origen employs Paul's language of self-emptying makes it likely that he has this language in mind when he uses the biblical language surrounding it. The thrust of the passage, therefore, is that the very act in which the Son empties himself of his equality with the Father, humbles himself, and becomes obedient to the Father unto death, makes known the Son's divine goodness and his conformity to the Father in a special way. It is the humble self-emptying itself by which the Son makes known his conformity to the Father and (to use the language of *De principiis* again) reveals the fullness of the godhead, which he and the Father share. If the previous passage only suggests a material similarity between the Father's identity and the Son's self-emptying, this passage asserts it.

Although we have arrived at the thesis that, for Origen, the Son's self-emptying and humility constitute his status as the image of the Father's substance, we have not yet fully seen how the material content of kenosis relates to that of the Father's act of generation. As we move to consider this most important question, we will find both a convergence and a divergence of the two, the similarity and dissimilarity that characterize analogy,

27. Cf. Magree's analysis of Gregory of Nyssa, who tends to avoid the exact language of kenosis in a way that Origen does not: "Shaped to the Measure of the *Kenosis*," 194–213.

and thus justify a description of the Father's act of generation as an *Ur-kenosis* that is analogically—not univocally—related to the Son's. In this respect, a passage in Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is especially important, because here Origen describes kenosis in the same emanationist terms with which he describes the Father's generation of the Son. The passage is especially interesting and important within the current theological landscape, where, for instance, Thomas Joseph White argues against modern articulations of intratrinitarian kenosis, suggesting instead that we describe the Father's act of generation in terms of outpouring rather than self-emptying.²⁸ For Origen, however, there is no such choice between outpouring/emanation and kenosis, as he describes the latter in terms of the former, even defining it in these terms. At this point in the commentary, Origen interprets the verse, "Your name is as ointment emptied out [ἐκκενωθῆν]. Therefore have the maidens loved you, have they drawn you" (Sg 1:3).²⁹ Moved by a use of the same verb (ἐκένωσεν < κενώω) that Paul uses in Philippians 2:7, Origen turns quickly to a christological interpretation rooted in Philippians 2:

For the sake of these young souls, therefore, in their growing and abundant life, He who was in the form of God emptied himself, that his name might be as ointment emptied out, that he might no longer dwell only in light unapproachable and abide in the form of God; but that the Word might be made flesh, and so these maiden souls at the beginning of their progress might not only love Him, but might draw Him to themselves.³⁰

Here there is a clear convergence with the texts already explored above: kenosis is the means by which the Son becomes accessible to human beings. At the same time, we get a more positive description of this self-emptying in the emanationist terms of the Song of Songs, as the kenosis is here likened to the emptying out and diffusion of ointment. Although the language of emptying

28. See White, *The Trinity*, 618–23.

29. See Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1.4, in *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 74–83 (hereafter *Comm. Cant.*).

30. *Comm. Cant.* 1.4 (p. 75).

suggests loss and depletion, here Origen associates it more with the concomitant act of filling, since that which is emptied is emptied *into* something else. As ointment or perfume shares its aroma and pervades what surrounds it, so the Son in his self-emptying makes himself newly accessible to human beings, who can now “receive him in that plenitude of Godhead.”³¹

More precisely, Origen alludes here to two receptacles of the Son’s self-emptying. In this passage, the emphasis is on those maiden souls who draw the Word to themselves, but the prior receptacle appears to be the humanity of Jesus: “He who was in the form of God emptied himself, that his name might be as ointment emptied out, that he might no longer dwell only in light unapproachable and abide in the form of God, *but that the Word might be made flesh.*”³² Before the Word can reveal and communicate his godhead to those maiden souls, he must first make himself dwell within the flesh of Jesus itself. That into which the Word empties himself is first and foremost the humanity of Jesus. Although Origen does not emphasize this aspect of the Son’s kenosis in this passage, he brings greater attention to it in other passages: in a later chapter of *De principiis*, Origen speaks in awe of the Son’s kenosis, “lost in the deepest amazement that such a being, towering high above all, should have ‘emptied himself’ of his majestic condition and become man and dwelt among men.”³³ Shortly after, he continues,

But of all the marvelous and splendid things about him there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very word of the Father, and the very wisdom of God, in which were created “all things visible and invisible,” can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judaea.³⁴

Here the Son’s kenosis is seen as equivalent to the Incarnation itself, that is, the act in which the very Wisdom of God came to

31. *Comm. Cant.* 1.4 (p. 83).

32. *Comm. Cant.* 1.4 (p. 75).

33. *De prin.* 2.6.1 (p. 136).

34. *De prin.* 2.6.2 (p. 137).

dwell within the man Jesus.³⁵ If we combine this passage with the previous passage from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, we can (at least in part) define kenosis for Origen as the act in which the Son empties himself *into*, and thus *fills*, the humanity of Jesus, coming to exist “within the compass of that man.”

Having offered this preliminary, and perhaps partial, definition, we can more precisely describe the material convergence with the Father’s generation we have already proposed. The key is once again the emanationist shape that characterizes both acts for Origen. Both acts constitute a certain sharing or communication of the divine being, which comes to exist in another reality, whether that is the person of the Son (with respect to the Father’s generation) or the human nature of Christ (with respect to the Son’s kenosis). Both are acts of self-diffusion, one being proper to the Father and one proper to the Son, but both equally defining them as the hypostatic realities they are. Furthermore, these acts accomplish a total sharing of the divine being. As already noted, the Son preserves the Father’s nature in its entirety as he eternally receives it from him in his generation. Analogously, as the Son empties himself into the humanity of Christ and becomes man, he makes himself accessible *in toto*. The image of the statue above aims to relay this point, as Origen considers the smaller statue (i.e., the humanity of the self-emptied Word) to retain the entire content (“the very form and material with an absolutely indistinguishable similarity”) of the larger statue (i.e., the Father), though in a smaller size.³⁶ Outside this particular metaphor, Origen also straightforwardly asserts that the Son in this self-emptying displays the *fullness* of his godhead.³⁷ Moreover, the two acts are related insofar as neither constitutes a change in the agent. From Origen’s perspective, this much is obvious with respect to the Father’s act, as no one of this era would consider ascribing change to an intradivine reality. More importantly, Origen also insists on this fact with respect to

35. The later Apollinarius is (at least in this respect) authentically Origenian when he straightforwardly defines Incarnation as self-emptying: “σάρκωσις κένωσις” (Theodoret of Cyrus, *Eranistes* [*Patrologia Graeca* 83:104], as cited in Magree, “Shaped to the Measure of the *Kenosis*,” 1).

36. See *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 29).

37. See *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 29).

the Son's self-emptying and Incarnation, and specifically against the charge of Celsus that the Incarnation necessitates or implies a change in God.³⁸

From all the prior data, one can justify an Origenian description of the Father's generation of the Son as an *Ur-kenosis* on the following grounds: both are acts of self-diffusion in which the whole of the diffused reality—the divinity that Father and Son share—is communicated, expressed, or made available to the object of its diffusion—whether the person of the Son or the humanity of Christ—without any change on the part of the agent. Furthermore, it is by this act that the Son becomes an image of the Father's substance and becomes most fully like the Father. For these reasons, there is in Origen's thought a clear—that is, definitionally grounded—analogy between the two acts. If this is *kenosis*, then we must say that it applies equally and more originally to the Father. Because of the likeness that the Son's act bears to the Father's, Origen's logic invites the reader to consider how the Son's self-emptying is grounded in the Father's generating act, how the aforementioned particularities of the *kenosis* belong to the Son's identity as image of the Father, and how the character of the intradivine life allows and anticipates the activity the Son performs in the economy. This is precisely the goal of modern theologies that attempt to ground the Son's *kenosis* in the intratrinitarian life, and it is a mode of thought that Origen's Christology especially aids and perhaps even encourages, even if Origen never had the thought himself.

At the same time, however, we must also lay out the limits that (from an Origenian perspective) pertain to this mode of thought and clarify the scope of the analogical interval that exists between the so-called *Ur-kenosis* and the Son's *kenosis* itself. The key lies in the same question of change. Origen, as we have already noted, insists against Celsus that the Incarnation does not necessitate substantial change in God.³⁹ At the same time,

38. See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 4.14–18 (p. 192–96); Magree, “Shaped to the Measure of the *Kenosis*,” 134–43.

39. See *ibid.*, 4.14–15 (pp. 193–94). “While remaining unchanged in essence, he comes down in his providence and care over human affairs” (*ibid.*, 4.14, pp. 192–93). “He who came down to men was originally ‘in the form of God’ and because of his love to men ‘emptied himself’ that men might be able

however, the Incarnation does suggest a newness of existence to the Son, who, even as he remains fully God, now also exists as a human being.⁴⁰ In order to describe this new modality of the Son's existence, Origen often turns to the kenotic language of Philippians 2, referring whatever "change" might be involved in the Incarnation to the Son's *condition* rather than his *nature*. In this respect, Michael Magree has presented the kenotic dimension of Origen's Christology as his response to the "hermeneutical pressure" that the Incarnation lays upon the doctrine of divine immutability.⁴¹ Magree understands Origen's use of kenosis as setting a barrier around what Christians can and cannot say with regard to divine immutability: immutability must be affirmed, but not in such a way that it prohibits the basic proclamation of Christianity that the divine Word became flesh (as Celsus affirmed). In order to navigate these two dimensions of the christological reality, Origen describes kenosis in such a way that the Son's nature remains unchanged and yet his condition undergoes a real innovation. These are the terms Origen himself uses: the Son empties himself of his "equality with the Father"⁴² and of his "majestic condition."⁴³ Using the language of Philippians 2 again, Origen describes this self-emptying as

to receive him. But he underwent no change from good to bad. . . . If the immortal divine Word assumes both a human body and a human soul, and by so doing appears to Celsus to be subject to change and remoulding, let him learn that the Word remains Word in essence" (ibid., 4.15, pp. 193–94).

40. In order to attempt to avoid the language of change, which Origen and all patristic authors insist on avoiding, I utilize the language of newness following Maximus the Confessor (*Ambigua ad Johannem* 41.1; *Ambigua ad Thomam* 5.9), who takes the language from Gregory of Nazianzus (*Orations* 39.13). I also think Origen's ideas accord well with those of Maximus, who compares the "change" (without using this term) to the innovation of natures in the mode (τρόπος) of their existence.

41. See Magree, "Shaped to the Measure of the *Kenosis*," 134ff., 65–66.

42. See again *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 29): "It is by some such likeness as this [i.e., the image of two statues] that the Son, in *emptying himself of his equality with the Father* and showing to us a way by which we may know him, becomes an 'express image' of God's substance."

43. See *De prin.* 2.6.1 (p. 136): "When, therefore, we consider these great and marvelous truths about the nature of the Son of God, we are lost in the deepest amazement that such a being, towering high above all, should have *emptied himself of his majestic condition* and become man and dwelt among men."

the assumption of a servant's form or a servant's condition,⁴⁴ specifying that this condition entails the genuine ascription of all things pertaining to the frailty of human existence, including birth from a woman, crying as a child, and sorrow and fear of death.⁴⁵ The previously discussed image of the statue bears a similar meaning, as the second statue must be smaller than the first.⁴⁶ It contains all the content of the first statue but in a smaller and thus more accessible form, illustrating that the self-emptying and Incarnation of the Son entail a certain diminishment of condition or status, diminished vis-à-vis the majesty that is naturally his as the divine Wisdom. Of course, such diminishment is implied by the very term *emptying*, and, although Origen makes a creative expressivist use of this term, he does not thereby simply negate its plainer meaning.

This change of condition therefore represents the decisive divergence of the Son's kenosis from the Father's act of generation. Although everything previously analyzed holds true, the way the Son accomplishes this emptying out and pouring forth of his divinity unmistakably bears a dimension of change—not a change of nature but a change of condition in which properly human limitations become the Son's own. Although some modern theologians might wish to think of the Father's birth of the Son in terms of self-limitation or change of condition, Origen (together with all other patristic authors) does not think in these terms. From this perspective, we can conclude that for

44. See, e.g., *Comm. in Cant.* 1.4 (p. 83): "For, if he had not emptied out the ointment—that is, the fullness of the divine spirit—and *humbled himself even to a servant's form*, no one would have been able to receive him in that plenitude of Godhead." Cf. *Comm. Ju.* 20.159 (vol. 2, p. 239): "Now, it is clear that these people locate the Father in a physical place, and understand that the Son has come into life by exchanging one place for another in a material sense, and not by exchanging one condition for another, as we have understood it."

45. See *De prin.* 2.6.2 (p. 137), where Origen lists these features of human existence that the Son took to himself, and makes sure to note that these events of his life are not "illusions caused by deceptive fantasies." Although Origen does not offer an entirely systematized and coherent account of these matters, I think we can see the natural completion of these ideas in his Alexandrian successor Cyril, who associates kenosis with the Son's act of uniting all human reality, especially its limitations, to himself. See, e.g., *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John McGuckin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 51, 55–56, 66–67, 76, 79, 86, 101, 105, 107, 115.

46. See *De prin.* 1.2.8 (p. 28–30).

Origen the Father's generation and the Son's self-emptying cannot be defined in exactly the same way. Although they bear an unmistakable relation to one another, the Son's act involves a self-limitation and lowering of status that the Father's does not. The latter, therefore, cannot be called an *Ur-kenosis* in any unequivocal sense.

Of course, modern theologians may not want to describe the Father's generation of the Son as a self-emptying *tout court*. Balthasar, for instance, ascribes kenosis to the Trinity only "by analogy."⁴⁷ It has not been the goal of this essay to establish what these modern theologians think about the kenosis of either the Son or the Father, but rather to see whether a patristic christological framework would permit any intelligible description of the Father's birth of the Son in kenotic terms. In Origen's Christology we have found a positive answer to this question, as the unmistakable convergence of the two acts encourages the reader to contemplate how the Son's self-emptying relates to the act that originally constitutes him as Son and image of the Father, and how this latter act constitutes a kind of prototype of the Son's self-emptying. To the extent that Origen refers the Son's kenosis back to the Father's generation of the Son, in the variety of ways we have just considered, he allows—even if he does not assert—a consideration of the Father's act of generation as an *Ur-kenosis*. At the same time, this Origenian version of intra-trinitarian kenosis can only be analogical with respect to the Son's own kenosis, and the crux of the matter is just how this analogical relation is negotiated. □

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47. See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, viii. On the relation between analogy and kenosis in Balthasar's thought, see Anne Carpenter, "Analogy and Kenosis," *Nova et Vetera* 17, no. 3 (2019): 811–38.