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Talk #6
The Self-Emptying of Christ: Phil 2:5-11



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6. *The Self-Emptying of Christ: Phil 2:5-11*

In this talk we shall look at the self-emptying of the Messiah, as described by St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2. This text is one of the most remarkable affirmations of the divine nature of the Messiah. It also calls attention to the paradoxical nature of Christ's mission: the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, came to earth to redeem mankind, by suffering utter humiliation and being emptied of His dignity in the sight of men.

In the Form of God

This text forms part of a larger section in which St. Paul is exhorting the Philippians to unity and humility. He urges them to be of one mind in charity, and tells them always to think better of others than themselves: "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but *in humility count others better than yourselves*. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:2-4)

We all know how difficult it is to think better of others than ourselves and to prefer their interests to our own. In order to motivate the Philippians to embrace humility and self-abnegation for the sake of charity, he gives the supreme example of Christ's Incarnation and Passion. The Incarnation is the absolute divine model of all humility. If the Son of God was not deterred from His mission of charity to become man by the colossal and infinite humiliation it entailed, how can we persist in that pride over our petty honor that causes so many feuds and breaches of charity in the bosom of the Church?

In order to make this point, Paul sketches the nature and mission of the Messiah in six brief verses (Phil 2:5-11):

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was existing in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 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, to the glory of God the Father.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, 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. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 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, to the glory of God the Father.

This text begins with the affirmation that the Messiah existed before the Incarnation "in the form of God" and in equality with God. What does it mean to exist in the form of God?

To help us grasp his meaning, St. Paul puts the Messiah's existence "in the *form of God*" in opposition to a new state in which he takes up the "*form of a servant*," in which he exists "in the likeness of men and being found in *human form*."

To be "in the form of a servant" and to be "found in human form" clearly means that the Messiah takes up human nature. Therefore, to be "in the form of God" means to *exist in the divine nature*. In philosophy, and in the language of the New Testament, "form" indicates the essence of a thing, what it really is, in opposition to external and accidental features. Here "form" means "nature" or "substance."

St. Paul thus is speaking about the two natures of Christ: divine and human. He exists eternally in the form of God and then takes on the form of man.

Notice that one existence is eternal and the other begins in time. St. Paul expresses this with the two participles: "existing" and "taking on." Greek has different verb forms to express the difference between a continuous and a discrete action (present or imperfect on the one hand, and aorist on the other). The first verb is a present participle with a continuous meaning, whereas the second is a participle signifying a discrete temporal action. The existing is a continuous state, whereas the "taking on" is a discrete action which occurred in time: 2,009 years ago.

If the Messiah existed "in the form of God," then He must possess the divine nature and all its attributes. One of these divine attributes is eternity. Since the Messiah was existing in the form of God, He must have existed in the form of God for all eternity, as God the Son. The divine nature is eternal and to exist in the form of God is to exist eternally.

The first ecumenical Council of Nicea was called to defend this truth enunciated by St. Paul: that Christ existed in the form of God, and thus was not a creature nor had a beginning to his existence. From all eternity the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

The heretic Arius, on the other hand, claimed that Christ was a “god,” but was not equal to the Father nor co-eternal with Him, but was generated by Him out of nothing at the beginning of creation. The Council of Nicea condemned the Arian heresy by saying that Christ is “consubstantial with the Father.” This is simply a more philosophical way of saying that the Messiah existed “in the form of God.”

Where did St. Paul get this doctrine? The obvious answer is that this was the very heart of the Revelation of the Gospel. Was there any preparation in Judaism for this doctrine? Did the prophets and ancient rabbis acknowledge that the Messiah was to have preexisted before the creation of the world? Some of them did.

The Old Testament alludes to the eternal preexistence of the Messiah in the famous text of Micah 5:1: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, and his going forth is *from the beginning, from the days of eternity*.”¹

This prophecy alludes to the two natures of Christ and to His two manners of coming forth: born in history in Bethlehem, and begotten from the Father from all eternity. The Messiah exists before His earthly birth in Bethlehem. We should connect this passage with the text from Proverbs 8:22-31, which speaks of the pre-existent and eternal Wisdom of God, who is distinct from God the Father and yet rejoices to be with the sons of men. The eternity of the Messiah also seems to be alluded to in Ps 72:17: “His name dwells before the sun.”

The idea that the Messiah exists with God the Father from before the creation of the world is an ancient Jewish idea attested to also in a non-Biblical source written a century and a half before Christ, the *First Book of Enoch*. This interesting work speaks of the Messiah as a “son of man,” who “shall be a light unto the nations, and hope for the troubled of heart. And all those who dwell on the earth shall fall down before him, and worship and praise and bless and sing to the Lord of Spirits. It is for this that he has been *chosen and hidden before Him, even before the creation of the world* and for evermore.”²

Equality with God

The fact that the Messiah existed in the form of God is reinforced by the affirmation that the Messiah did not regard equality with God as “something to be grasped.” The Greek word refers to unjust possession, robbery, or spoil, deriving from the verb “to rob.”

¹ For Mic 5:1b I have followed the Douay Rheims version (Mic 5:2), in harmony with the Nova Vulgata.

² 1 Enoch 48:4-6. See also 46:1-3; 62:7-9; quoted in Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne Univ. Press, 1979), 18-19. These texts are inspired by Dan 7:13-14. See the discussion of the preexistence of the Messiah in ancient Jewish thought in “Preexistence,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (NY: Ktav Publishing, 1964), 183-184.

The word has a double meaning here. On the one hand, the Messiah did not hold being equal with God as “robbery.” In every pure creature, on the contrary, a claim to stand on an equal footing with God would be robbery indeed: the greatest of all sacrileges.

This was the charge for which Jesus was almost stoned in John 10:31-33—making Himself equal to God—and for which He was condemned to death on the Cross.

What was not “robbery” for Christ, because He is the eternal Son of God, was indeed robbery for Adam and Eve, and will be again for the Antichrist. The essence of the original sin of Adam and Eve was seeking to make themselves equal to God in a way a pure creature can never be: arbiters of good and evil. Likewise, the Antichrist will exemplify this sin, seating himself in the temple of God as if he were God (2 Thes 2:4).

On the other hand, the “robbery” or “grasping” has another meaning here. Despite existing legitimately in the form of God and in equality with God the Father, the Son of God did not disdain to empty Himself and take on the form of servant, taking on a created nature in which He would be condemned to death in the most humiliating and cruel way. He did not jealously hold onto or “grasp” His divine honor in such a way that He was afraid to appear without it, but allowed Himself to be born as a man, and to die a man of sorrows:

But emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

The reference to the “form of a servant,” most probably is a reference to the suffering servant described in Isaiah 42-53. Indeed the movement of thought of Phil 2:5-11 is parallel to Is 52:13-53:12, which starts with the glory of the “servant of the Lord” and then proceeds to show His humiliation and death, and ends with the glory won by His redemptive death.³

Self-Emptying of Christ

What does it mean that Christ emptied Himself? Does it mean that Christ put off His divine nature in order to taken on human nature? Or did He temporarily give up his divine attributes so that He could take on human suffering?

³ Is 52:13-53:12: “Behold, my *servant* shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. As many were astonished at him—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men. . . . He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. . . .”

By no means. The divine nature cannot be put off, for it is unchangeable and eternal. God Himself cannot stop being God even if, for the sake of argument, He could so desire.

The self-emptying of Christ can only mean that Christ, from all eternity in the form of God, took on another nature in the fullness of time in which He could suffer humiliation unto death in supreme agony.

Christ's redemptive Incarnation means that He who is equal to God the Father in heavenly glory assumes human weakness and ignominy for the redemption of His sinful creatures; He who is impassible in His divinity assumes the depths of human suffering; He who created the galaxies assumes the form of zygote — becoming an embryo, infant, child, and finally a corpse; He who carries the heavens with the breath of His spirit carries a Cross to Calvary.

A fantastic and supremely authoritative interpretation of Christ's self-emptying was given by Pope St. Leo the Great in his letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople that was read in the fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. After hearing the letter the conciliar Fathers proclaimed: "Peter has spoken through Leo!" Leo wrote:

Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person, *majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality*: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition *inviolable nature was united with passible nature*, so that, as suited the needs of our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other. . . . He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, *increasing the human and not diminishing the divine*: because *that emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible* and, Creator and Lord of all things though He be, wished to be a mortal, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power. Accordingly He who while remaining in the form of God made man, was also made man in the form of a slave. For *both natures retain their own proper character without loss*: and as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God. . . . Consequently, the Son of God entered into these lowly conditions of the world, after descending from His celestial throne, and though He did not withdraw from the glory of the Father, He was *generated in a new order and in a new nativity*. In a new order, because *invisible in His own, He was made visible in ours; incomprehensible [in His own], He wished to be comprehended; permanent before times, He began to be in time; the Lord of the universe assumed the form of a slave, concealing the immensity of His majesty*; the impassible God did not disdain to be a passible man and the immortal [did not disdain] to be subject to the laws of death.

Lutheran Interpretation

Some currents of Lutheran theology give an erroneous interpretation of Christ's self-emptying. These currents are referred to as "kenotic" theology, an expression which comes from the Greek word "kenosis," which means "self-emptying."

Luther himself put particular importance on the text of Phil 2:5-11, which speaks of the self-emptying (kenosis) of the Word.⁴ This was interpreted to mean that after the Incarnation, the humanity of Christ voluntarily renounced the use of divine attributes which belonged to it in virtue of the Incarnation. His self-emptying would be His voluntary renunciation of the full extent of the divine nature and glory given to His humanity, during the period of His earthly life.⁵ Later Protestant theologians would interpret this text to mean that the divine nature of the Word imposed restrictions on itself during the Incarnation.

Instead of focusing on two natures, as does the classical Christology of the Council of Chalcedon, this Lutheran theological current focuses on two states of Christ: the *state of self-emptying* and the *state of exaltation* after the Resurrection. In the state of self-emptying, the humanity of Christ temporarily renounced its right to use or possess the divine attributes.

In the interpretation given by the Catholic Tradition, on the contrary, the kenosis spoken of by St. Paul refers to the fact that the *Person* of the Word of God infinitely condescended to assume a human nature in the Incarnation in which He could suffer and die. Thus he says that He who was "in the form of God" took "the form of a servant" in which He was "obedient unto death, even death on a cross." The text does not imply that the divine *nature* of the Word suffered diminution or became reduced or circumscribed, which would be absolutely impossible. On the contrary, the *Person* of the Word took on the limitations of human nature without losing all the attributes of the divine nature, which are completely immutable.

Obedience of Christ

St. Paul makes it clear that the self-emptying of Christ involved free human obedience to the will of God the Father, for He *became obedient unto death, even death on a cross*" (Phil 2:8). The obedience of Christ clearly does not involve His divine nature in which He is equal to God the Father, but the form of a servant: His true human nature. The Son of God assumed human nature so that He could obey the Father unto death and so redeem man.

This voluntary obedience to the death was extremely fitting, for man's fall came through disobedience to the will of God. The original sin consisted most precisely in

⁴ See *De libertate christiana* (Weimar, 1883), vol. 7, p. 65.

⁵ This interpretation was given in a more explicit way, although with different nuances, by the Lutheran theologians John Brenz (d. 1570) and Chemnitz, and their respective schools.

the desire for a moral autonomy, and rebellion against the imposition of a moral order imposed by God. Adam and Eve did not wish to obey.

All of our personal sins, as well, consist essentially in disobedience to the Law of God as revealed by our conscience. Thus to repair sin, the reparation most fittingly had to come through a supreme act of obedience.

For Christ it was not a question of obedience directly to the natural moral law, which does not command that an innocent suffer for the guilty. Christ would not have sinned if He did not die for us. Nevertheless, He freely chose to die in obedience to the divine plan for the Redemption of the human race. In the Garden of Gethsemane when He was taken prisoner, Christ tells Peter: “*Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?*” (Jn 18:11).

Christ says that He received a command from the Father (Jn 10:18, 14:31), which was the supreme realization of the double commandment: love of God and love of neighbor, to be realized in His Passion.

St. Paul, in Rom 8:32, says that God the Father “spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all.” Thus God the Father can be truly said to have delivered Christ over to death.

St. Thomas Aquinas treats this subject in *ST* III, q. 47, a. 2:

It was fitting that Christ should suffer out of obedience. First of all, because it was in keeping with human justification, that ‘as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just,’ as is written Rm. 5:19. Secondly, it was suitable for reconciling man with God: hence it is written (Rm. 5:10): ‘We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son,’ insofar as Christ’s death was a most acceptable sacrifice to God, according to Eph. 5:2: ‘He delivered Himself for us an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness.’ Now obedience is preferred to all sacrifices according to 1 Kgs. 15:22: ‘Obedience is better than sacrifices.’ Therefore it was fitting that the sacrifice of Christ’s Passion and death should proceed from obedience. Thirdly, it was in keeping with His victory whereby He triumphed over death and its author; because a soldier cannot conquer unless he obey his captain. And so the Man-Christ secured the victory through being obedient to God, according to Prov. 21:28: ‘An obedient man shall speak of victory.’

Glorification of Christ

After emptying and humbling Himself even unto death on the Cross, the humanity of Christ was glorified in the Resurrection, and given universal dominion and kingship.

The glorification of the Messiah here corresponds to the Messianic prophecy of Dan 7:13-14:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

However, St. Paul goes further than the magnificent glorification of the Son of Man spoken of by the prophet Daniel, saying that the Messiah’s exaltation includes receiving the worship proper to God alone, for “God bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 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*, to the glory of God the Father.”

What is the “name above every name”? This name is obviously that of God, by which Jesus merits the adoration of every creature, including the angels. The fact that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Christ’s Lordship is a clear allusion to Is 45:21-23:

And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: “*To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*”

Every knee shall bow to God alone, and every tongue shall confess and swear by His holy name. The fact that this unique adoration proper to God alone is to be given to the glorified Messiah shows most clearly, if it were still in doubt, that the crucified and glorified Messiah is none other than the God and Lord of Israel.

Christ is to receive this glorification from all men: those in the Church triumphant in heaven, those in the Church suffering in Purgatory, and those in the Church militant on earth: “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

The Title “Kyrios”

This conclusion is still further strengthened by the title “Lord” that is given to Christ. Although it could have other senses according to the context,⁶ the word “Lord” in the Jewish liturgical context is a divine title, and it is in this sense that it occurs throughout the epistles of the New Testament. Since it was forbidden by the Jewish oral tradition to pronounce the sacred Tetragrammaton

6 See CCC, no. 448: “Very often in the Gospels people address Jesus as ‘Lord.’ This title testifies to the respect and trust of those who approach him for help and healing. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit, ‘Lord’ expresses the recognition of the divine mystery of Jesus.”

(YHWH) out of reverence, the word *Adonai* (“Lord” in Hebrew) was pronounced in its place in Scripture, liturgy, and prayer. The original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton could be licitly said aloud only once a year on the feast of Yom Kippur, by the High Priest prostrate behind the veil of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. Otherwise, pronunciation of the sacred divine name was a capital crime, punishable by stoning.

This substitution can be seen in the Masoretic text of the Bible, in which the Tetragrammaton is given the vowel points that correspond to *Adonai*, which was read in place of the sacred name.

By the way, this is the origin of the title “Jehovah,” which comes from reading the Tetragrammaton with the vowels which were put under it to vocalize the word, *Adonai* (Lord), which was to be read in its place. It is the result of failing to understand the Jewish practice of substituting *Adonai* for the sacred name.

In the Greek Septuagint, the Tetragrammaton is regularly translated as *Kyrios*, the Greek word for Lord. Since the Septuagint was the version of the Bible used by all Greek-speaking Jews and by the early Church, it is clear that the title “*Kyrios*” would have been understood by the Jewish and Christian communities of the first century as a divine title. For this reason, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 449, states:

By attributing to Jesus the divine title “Lord”, the first confessions of the Church’s faith affirm from the beginning that the power, honor and glory due to God the Father are due also to Jesus, because “he was in the form of God”, and the Father manifested the sovereignty of Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him into his glory.⁷

The divine meaning of the title “Lord” can be seen in the episode of the miraculous catch of fish in Lk 5:4-8, in which Peter comes to believe on account of the miracle. At first Peter addresses Jesus as “Master” (*epistata*), whereas after the miraculous catch he says: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Benedict XVI, in *Jesus of Nazareth*, says:

This inner realization of the proximity of God himself in Jesus suddenly breaks in upon Peter and finds expression in the title that he now uses for Jesus: ‘Kyrios’ (Lord). It is the designation for God that was used in the Old Testament as a substitute for the unutterable divine name given from the burning bush. Whereas before putting out from the shore, Peter called Jesus *epistata*, which means ‘master,’ ‘teacher,’ ‘rabbi,’ he now recognizes him as the Kyrios.”

⁷ See also the recent document of the Congregation for Divine Worship, “On the Name of God,” of June 29, 2008: “The attribution of this title [Kyrios] to the Risen Lord corresponds exactly to the proclamation of His divinity.” This document gives a good summary of the substitution of *Kyrios* for the Tetragrammaton.

A recent letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship, “On the Name of God,” of June 29, 2008, spoke on the liturgical use of the Tetragrammaton. It forbids its use in the liturgy, and directs that it should be substituted instead by “*Kyrios*,” “*Dominus*”, or “Lord.” The document states:

The venerable biblical tradition of Sacred Scripture, known as the Old Testament, displays a series of divine appellations, among which is the sacred name of God revealed in the tetragrammaton YHWH ([Hebrew text: Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay]). As an expression of the infinite greatness and majesty of God, it was held to be unpronounceable and hence was replaced during the reading of Sacred Scripture by means of the use of an alternate name: “Adonai,” which means “Lord.”

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the so-called Septuagint, dating back to the last centuries prior to the Christian era, had regularly rendered the Hebrew tetragrammaton with the Greek word *Kyrios*, which means “Lord.” Since the text of the Septuagint constituted the Bible of the first generation of Greek-speaking Christians, in which language all the books of the New Testament were also written, these Christians, too, from the beginning never pronounced the divine tetragrammaton. Something similar happened likewise for Latin-speaking Christians, whose literature began to emerge from the second century, as first the *Vetus Latina* and, later, the *Vulgate* of St. Jerome attest: in these translations, too, the tetragrammaton was regularly replaced with the Latin word “*Dominus*,” corresponding both to the Hebrew *Adonai* and to the Greek *Kyrios*. The same holds for the recent Neo-Vulgate which the Church employs in the Liturgy.

This fact has had important implications for New Testament Christology itself. When in fact St. Paul, with regard to the Crucifixion, writes that “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9), he does not mean any other name than “Lord,” for he continues by saying, “and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:11; cf. Is 42:8: “I am the Lord; that is my name”). **The attribution of this title to the Risen Christ corresponds exactly to the proclamation of his divinity.** The title in fact becomes **interchangeable between the God of Israel and the Messiah of the Christian faith**, even though it is not in fact one of the titles used for the Messiah of Israel. . . . In the properly Christological sense, apart from the text cited of Philippians 2:9-11, one can remember Romans 10:9 (“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”), 1 Corinthians 2:8 (“they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”), 1 Corinthians 12:3 (“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit”) and the frequent formula concerning the Christian who lives

“in the Lord” (Rm 16:2; 1 Cor 7:22; 1 Thess 3:8; etc.). Avoiding pronouncing the tetragrammaton of the name of God on the part of the Church has therefore its own grounds. Apart from a motive of a purely philological order, there is also that of remaining faithful to the Church’s tradition, from the beginning, that the sacred tetragrammaton was never pronounced in the Christian context nor translated into any of the languages into which the Bible was translated.

The traditional practice of avoiding the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton respects the Jewish reverence for the divine name, reflects the practice of the Apostles themselves, and brings out the original divine significance of the title of “Lord” given to Christ.

Kyrios as the Divine Title Proper to the Son of God

The New Testament uses the title “Lord” especially to indicate the divinity of the Son of God. The Hebrew Old Testament has two principal names for God: *Elohim* (God) and the Tetragrammaton (pronounced as *Adonai* [Lord]).

The standard New Testament usage is to indicate God the Son with the title Lord (*Kyrios*), which would correspond to the Tetragrammaton, and to indicate God the Father with the title “God,” which would correspond to *Elohim*. Both names are titles of God, and neither one is more holy or more divine than the other. The Tetragrammaton, however, is given greater reverence from the simple fact that it is not pronounced. It would seem that the New Testament generally distinguishes the two names so as to distinguish the two divine Persons: Father and Son.

For example, the Second Letter to the Corinthians concludes with a Trinitarian doxology: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Jesus is referred to as Lord whereas the Father is referred to as God. The distinction of titles serves to distinguish the persons within the equality of the Godhead.

Similarly, in 1 Cor 8:6, he says: “There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” This text clearly shows that the Son is distinct from the Father, but yet consubstantial with Him, for the work of creation is attributed equally to both the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, however, St. Paul speaks of Christ directly as God, as in Tit 2:13: “Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Another text is Rom 9:5: “To them [the Jews] belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever.”

Modern exegesis of the Old Testament poses the question of why some Old Testament texts preferentially use one or

the other of the divine names (*Elohim* or the Tetragrammaton). Nineteenth-century scholars put forth the theory that the Five Books of Moses were composed from preexisting texts which gave preference to one or the other. Thus they speak of the J or the E source.

A much better explanation of the difference of divine names, to my mind, is that the two divine names have different connotations and serve to reveal and emphasize different divine attributes. The title *Elohim* is used preferentially to speak of God’s omnipotence and creative power. The Tetragrammaton is used preferentially to refer to the divine mercy, and God’s intervention in salvation history. Thus it is not unreasonable that the New Testament should designate the Son of God preferentially with the title “Lord” which is intimately associated with the Tetragrammaton, for the Incarnation of the Son of God is the maximum work of God’s mercy, condescension, and salvation.

Conclusion

The text of Phil 2:5-11 is tremendously important for various reasons. First, the hymn of Phil 2:5-11 is a most eloquent and powerful witness to the divinity of the crucified Messiah. It shows that the unambiguous confession of Christ’s full equality with God the Father in His divine nature stands at the heart of the Apostolic preaching and liturgy. This is given further weight from the fact that the letter to the Philippians was written very early, about thirty years after the crucifixion of the Lord, and many exegetes think that the text of Phil 2:5-11 predates the rest of the letter, for they think it is an early Christian liturgical hymn quoted by St. Paul, given that it seems to be in the form of liturgical verse. It would thus belong to the first two decades of the Church’s life.

Secondly, Phil 2:5-11 manifests the core of the Church’s faith on the nature of Christ: that He has two natures in the unity of one person. Thus He exists eternally in the form of God and in the fullness of time has taken on human nature in the Incarnation.

Third, this text manifests the reason for the Incarnation, in that the Messiah becomes man to be “obedient unto death, even death on a cross,” to redeem mankind as the “suffering servant” of the Lord, He who, at the same time, is the Lord.

Fourth, it beautifully manifests the glorification of the Messiah as the result of His victory over death and sin, and His right to the adoration of every creature, “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

Finally, Phil 2:5-11 reveals how Christ is the ultimate model of all Christian conduct. St. Paul introduced this hymn into his letter, not to make a doctrinal point about Christology or the nature of Christ, but to deliver the most fundamental teaching on how we should defer to neighbor

for Christ's sake. As Christ did not disdain to be treated as a criminal for the sake of supreme charity, so we must do likewise in the difficult circumstances of daily life. Let us pray for the grace to be able to empty ourselves at the bidding of holy charity, in imitation of the Lord.