

A PHILOSOPHICAL CHRISTOLOGY OF XAVIER TILLIETTE

Revelation as Kenotic and Reason as Ecstatic

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Article abstract

This study has two aims: 1) to provide a concrete instance of how revelation critiques and enlarges philosophy, of how faith dictates to reason, and 2) to draft an outline of a philosophical christology that would fall squarely within the confines of Xavier Tilliette's own operative principles. Consequently, if revelation is kenotic, then philosophy must also sketch a general ontology that is also kenotic. In other words, if revelation critiques and enlarges philosophy, then kenosis is not exceptional but paradigmatic and so philosophical ontology and philosophical theology must be kenotic all the way down. This article is an attempt to sketch the latter, i.e. a thoroughly kenotic philosophical theology.

A PHILOSOPHICAL CHRISTOLOGY OF XAVIER TILLIETTE: Revelation as Kenotic and Reason as Ecstatic

TYLER TRITTEN

Apart from his work on F.W.J. Schelling, Xavier Tilliette may best be known for his work on philosophical christology.¹ I will ultimately present a Tillietian philosophical christology, i.e., not necessarily Tilliette's own christology but a christology that is in accord with his own philosophical commitments. In fact, despite multiple books on philosophical christology, it is not clear that Tilliette even has a christology, as his task is not to make a christology so much as to learn what christology itself can teach us, i.e., can teach philosophers.

Before sketching a Tillietian philosophical christology, it is prudent to offer some preliminary comments concerning what such an endeavor has to say about the relation between 1) revelation and history, and 2) faith and reason. Concerning faith and reason, it is, for Tilliette, not primarily a question of how faith might be demonstrated or even just explicated philosophically, whereby faith would be passive and reason active, but it is rather a question of how revelation can act upon reason, of how reason is relegated to the role of passive handmaiden. More precisely, how can revelation, by which Tilliette principally means the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah, expand the borders of philosophy? How does revelation bring about an "ekstasis of reason?" The attempt is thus not to proselytize but to show how the purview of reason can be enlarged and the borders of philosophy expanded by means

1. Tilliette published four books on philosophical christology: *Le Christ de la philosophie: Prolégomènes à une christologie philosophique* (Cogitatio fidei, 155) (henceforth abbreviated *Le Christ de la philosophie*), Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990 [The Christ of Philosophy: Prolegomena to a Philosophical Christology]; *Le Christ des philosophes: Du Maître de sagesse au divin témoin* (Ouvertures, 10) (henceforth abbreviated *Le Christ des philosophes*), Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1993 [The Christ of Philosophers: From the Master of Wisdom to Divine Witness]; *La christologie idéaliste*² (Jésus et Jésus Christ, 28) (henceforth abbreviated *La christologie*), Paris: Desclée, 1995 [Idealist Christology]; *Qu'est-ce que la christologie philosophique?* (Parole et Silence) (henceforth abbreviated *Qu'est-ce?*), Paris: Collège des Bernardins, 2013 [What is Philosophical Christology?]. The first, which is the most extensive treatment, was published in France in 1990, but was translated into German as *Philosophische Christologie: eine Hinführung* (Theologia Romanica, 22), Bonn: Johannes Verlag, 1998.

of “theological givens.” The operative assumption is thus that the domain of reason alone is too narrow to speak of the empirical, i.e. of “facts,” religious or otherwise, that can be known by no other means than “revelation.”

What Revelation Does to Philosophy: Methodological Considerations

When it comes to the relationship between revelation and reason, Tilliette does not mince words. “The problem is not the following: how christology must be depicted in order to satisfy the requirements of philosophy, but rather how philosophy has to present itself in order to correspond to the requirements of christology.”² If philosophy must adhere to dictates set by christology, it is because christology does not merely offer philosophy some content about which to think, but it alters philosophy. The christological “fact” does not just provide an object of study, but it also delimits the claims philosophy can make and judges claims it does make. But, what is a fact and how could the Messianic event be treated as a fact? In other words, an explanation of why revelation, if it is, is necessarily factual must first be offered.

“The simplest conceivable philosophical access to Jesus Christ, i.e. with the least pitfalls,” Tilliette confesses, “seems to be the acceptance of his historical existence, of his words and of his teaching.”³ This, however – Jesus’ teachings and miracles, the words and deeds of a historical figure – is decidedly *not* the revelatory fact, the fact of Jesus as *the Messiah*. Like the Apostle Paul, who has comparatively little to say about the so-called “historical Jesus,” rather deigning to know nothing but “Christ crucified,” it is the personhood and *being* of Jesus that constitutes the fact of the revelation. The fact under question, then, does not primarily involve epistemological problems concerning historical knowledge, though these cannot be excluded, but it is a question concerning an *ontological* fact. In other words, it would be an inner fact at least as much as it would be a fact that requires external, i.e. historiographical, verification.

Tilliette proffers that “a fact is in no way something objectively present or superficial...”⁴ This does not mean that a fact cannot be objectively present,

2. Xavier TILLIETTE, “Ist eine philosophische Christologie möglich?” in *Probleme und Aspekte der Fundamentaltheologie* (henceforth abbreviated “Ist möglich?”), Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1985), 169-187 (186): “Das Problem lautet nicht: wie muß sich die Christologie darstellen, um den Forderungen der Philosophie zu genügen, sondern wohl eher: wie hat sich die Philosophie zu präsentieren, um den Anforderungen der Christologie zu entsprechen.”

3. “Ist möglich?,” p. 173: “Der einfachste, mit den wenigsten Fallstricken versehene philosophische Zugang zu Jesus Christus, scheint die Annahme seiner historischen Existenz, seines Wortes und seiner Lehre zu sein.”

4. Xavier TILLIETTE, “Die ‘höhere Geschichte’,” in Ludwig HASLER (ed.), *Schelling, seine Bedeutung für eine Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte: Referate und Kolloquien der Internationalen Schelling-Tagung Zürich 1979* (henceforth abbreviated “Höhere Geschichte”), Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1981, pp. 193-204 (193): “...die Tatsache keineswegs etwas Vorhandenes oder Oberflächliches ist...”

but objective presence is not that wherein facticity lies. A fact is something that cannot possibly be known *a priori*, but only and insofar as it is “given.” Givenness, though, is also not reducible to a sense datum, to the *a posteriori*. There is, for example, absolutely no possible knowledge of the fact of gravity, which is also not an *a posteriori* sense datum, apart from its effect, i.e., the falling of bodies. Subsequent to this phenomenon, the regular falling of bodies, reason and speculation will enter the scene to posit a law or mechanism as well as its mathematical formulation to account for this given, but only, as it were, “after the fact.” In short, reason always does its work too late to account for the facticity of a fact, i.e. for its quoddity, although it can account for a thing’s quiddity and, sometimes, provide the mathematical formula correspondent to its operation. Rather than appeal to gravity, however, Tilliette offers a different example.

Another analogy offers the simple presence of a book: paper and letters are echoes of the same; only understanding discloses the authentic work; the fact is spirit and thought. We are not accustomed to observe a book as a fact, but rather as a thing, but it depends on the intention: a fact is everywhere a puzzle that should first be developed before we can point to it.⁵

A fact (*Tatsache*) is neither the objective thing (*Ding*) nor the superficially positivistic fact of the matter (*Sache*) because the matter (*Sache*) depends on something inner, like a free deed (*Tat*), hence a real fact is a *Tat-sache*. Said differently, all *factum* is based in *actum*. This is that to which Tilliette is alluding when he says that “it depends on the *intention*.” Intention is always intention to will, intention to act, and only an act can account for a fact’s facticity, i.e. its quoddity, while reason can only ever approach the fact’s essence or quiddity. Reason thus always proves insufficient in the face of facticity or, at least, its work is always belated. In light of a political event, for example, one asks “What happened? What did I just see?” The fact of the matter is clearly not reducible to a sense datum. The truly factual, a *Tatsache* (a “matter of act”), has to do with something inner, with will. Did one witness a just protest or an act of terrorism? The fact of the matter cannot be gleaned through a simple narration of characters and events. Rather, one must peer into the inside, into the will that both determines the actual nature of the event as well as the identity of the characters who executed it. The characters and the event both are but the external effects of an internal cause.

Drawing on rhetoric from Kant’s first *Critique*, reason, only able to account for quiddity, has but a negative function, while actual existence or facticity

5. “Höhere Geschichte,” 194: “Eine andere Analogie bietet die einfache Gegenwart eines Buches: Papier und Buchstaben sind Schalle desselben, das authentische Werk eröffnet nur das Verständnis, die Tatsache ist Geist und Gedanke. Wir sind nicht gewohnt, ein Buch als eine Tatsache zu betrachten, eher als sein Ding, aber es kommt auf die Absicht an: die Tatsache ist überall ein Rätsel, die erst erschlossen werden soll, bevor wir auf sie hinweisen können.”

is the positive. On this basis, Tilliette, following Schelling, sketches “positive philosophy as a superior empiricism.”⁶ If deeds, or at least divine deeds, are wrought in eternity but bear temporal effects, then a superior empiricism that concerns itself with the facticity of facts, i.e. with the will (or principle) that brought them about, can and even *must* speak of the supersensible and the eternal. Theology, then, perhaps concerned with a supersensible God who only acts eternally and yet effectuates salvation history within time, is a science of the fact; theology is an empirical science, but a higher empiricism than that of sensibilism. Tilliette is always quick to privilege “the grandeur of the Fact, and singularly the Fact of Revelation, by which reality imposes itself and which would not be able to be anticipated *a priori* – and correlatively the impotence of rationalisms to bring themselves to the rank of the Fact.”⁷ Clearly, reason does not merely receive its content from the Fact, but reason is critiqued and altered by the Fact.

Facts alter thinking; facts judge thought, sometimes condemning it for not living up to the standard set by the fact. As one commentator argues, for Tilliette “philosophy does not lead to Christ, but with him (...) finds its point of departure....”⁸ That facts are, in this sense, “normative” does not mean, however, that everything claimed as a fact really is one. If facts are not simply brute but have a meaning – there is here no fact-value distinction – then to debate the meaning of a fact is tantamount to debating the fact itself. This is why two people can share the exact same sense data, yet one can state that it is a fact that a revolution is taking place and the other can ask, “What revolution?” Likewise, before the phenomenon of Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, one could affirm that there is a law at play here, but one not yet predictable. One could also, however, rather affirm not uncertainty but *indeterminacy* as the fact observed, i.e. that there simply is no lawfulness in effect here because spontaneity or contingency is a real principle of the universe. If the latter is the case, then the Uncertainty Principle should not take its name from epistemic categories, but it should rather utilize ontological terminology: the Indeterminacy Principle or even the Spontaneity Principle.

6. Xavier TILLIETTE, *La mythologie comprise. Schelling et l’interprétation du paganisme* (Bibliothèque d’histoire de la philosophie) (henceforth abbreviated *Mythologie comprise*), Paris: Vrin, 2002, p. 57: “la philosophie positive comme empirisme supérieur.”

7. Xavier TILLIETTE, “Essai de transition du dieu des philosophes au Dieu des chrétiens,” *Archivio di filosofia*, 9(1969) (henceforth abbreviated “Du dieu”), pp. 459-471 (469): “...la grandeur du Fait, et singulièrement du Fait de la Révélation, dont la réalité s’impose et qui ne saurait être anticipé a priori – et corrélativement l’impuissance des rationalismes à se hisser à la hauteur du Fait.”

8. Werner WEDLER, “Gedanken von Schiffbrüchigen ... – Anmerkungen zu Xavier Tilliettes, ‘Philosophischer Christologie’ aus protestantischer Sicht,” in Steffen DIETZSCH and Gian Franco FRIGO (eds.), *Vernunft und Glauben: Ein philosophischer Dialog der Moderne mit dem Christentum*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), p. 43: “...daß die Philosophie nicht zu Christus hinführt, sondern bei ihm (...) ihren Ausgangspunkt findet...”

Tilliette hereby furthers Kant's tribunal of reason, showing not just that reason is measured and finite, but, contra Kant, that reason cannot be its own measure, that it cannot enact its own critique. Reason cannot simultaneously play the role of prosecutor and defendant. Accordingly, one has not necessarily committed any epistemic violations in proclaiming a revelatory event, e.g. Jesus the Messiah, even if one is speculating further than reason alone can proceed. It is precisely because reason is limited that one is authorized to venture further than principled, Kantian skepticism and to speculate freely. Contra Kant, if reason is critiqued by facticity, then we simply cannot remain within the bounds of reason alone.

Preliminary Considerations: Kant, Fichte and Hegel

Tilliette spies two fallacies that are prohibitive to the inductive path to philosophical christology (and christological philosophy). They may be termed the "transcendental fallacy" (or, perhaps, the "Enlightenment fallacy"), exhibited by Kant and Fichte (and Karl Rahner), and the "coextensive fallacy," exhibited by Hegel.

Tilliette incisively declares, "The God of the *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] does not have a Son...."⁹ The God of the Enlightenment, the God of "theism," a term that did not even exist until the 1600s, would have no need of a Son, as it would have no need of internal communion, internal relation and internal life. This God need only be consistent, i.e. rational, and creative, though the creative act may be deistically conceived. As rational, it would also be autonomous and, hence, moral. This morality, however, would never require God to go above and beyond its duties. On this model, for example, God would feel no compunction to incarnate himself in order to be able to sacrifice himself. As Tilliette scathingly bemoans, "...the moral Law is without a face...."¹⁰ This model, then, in Tilliette's estimation, is also impersonal.

More damning, however, is that this God, Kant's God, is ontologically insufficient. Having created, this God would feel no compunction to ensure that the creation achieves its purpose, as the being of this God would in no way be necessarily involved with the being of the creation. Kant's God, in other words, would lie at a transcendental remove from the world, able to gaze upon it, in order to know it rather than necessarily to love it. Given this uninvolved view from nowhere, God would be perfectly impassive. Even were this interpretation of Kant too inflexible, omitting many nuances of Kant's thought, it is still ultimately a God whose primary function is to think and to know rather than to love. According to Tilliette's own charitable interpretation, "The

9. *La christologie*, p. 19: "Le Dieu de l'*Aufklärung* n'a pas de Fils..."

10. *La christologie*, p. 43: "...la Loi morale est sans visage..."

Christ of thought is admittedly not similar to the transcendental ego that neither cries nor laughs (...) but it is also no longer similar to the sweet rabbi of Galilee....¹¹ The sweet rabbi, the tree-hugging Messiah, is but an ideal, a purified projection of the Messiah as a perfect moral exemplar, and nothing more. This image, however, is not only historically inaccurate, as Jesus once took up a whip to drive people out of the temple, but it also makes the Messiah no longer an actual person, but only an idea and ideal, a Messiah palatable to those whose religion wishes to remain safely within the limits of reason alone.

There is an ontological, rather than moral, route to this God, but Kant does not choose this path, always rejecting any notion of the ontology of the Messiah in order to have him as nothing more than a moral exemplar. According to Tilliette's reading of Kant, "Jesus was the conforming copy of the *Urbild* [original image] of a humanity agreeable to God" – the image of an original ontological condition of humanity – "but Kant hastily recloses the half-open door to the being of Christ."¹² At every turn, Kant refuses any ontological analysis of the being of the Messiah, wanting to know nothing more than a historical figure who lived a flawless moral life. For instance, "Concerning a personal and spiritual survival of Christ, concerning a mystical and sacramental life in the Body of the Church, concerning the Master of History, Kant knows nothing. Christ is Master and moral Exemplar, and of History only a 'hero'."¹³ Kant knows only the God of the ethical philosopher, which is tantamount to knowing only the great hero and teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. This personage, however, is in no way a Messiah. As Tilliette criticizes, "[The Idea of Christ] ...or Christ in Idea (...) has principally been taken into circulation by Karl Rahner (...). It is referred directly to the Kant of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, but one knows that this little, remarkable book carefully avoids the name of Christ...."¹⁴ Christ (or Messiah), unlike Jesus of Nazareth, is not a positivistically verifiable personage. Kant thus enacts a fateful separation between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith, Jesus who is the Messiah.

Fichte follows, even radicalizes, this transcendental fallacy. According to Tilliette "...the Jesus Christ of Fichte is the first doctor of science, the first *Wissenschaftler*. He is, in effect, the inventor of the *Doctrine of Science*, the

11. *Qu'est-ce?*, p. 99: "Le Christ de la pensée n'est certes pas pareil au Je transcendental qui ne pleure ni ne rit (...) mais Il n'est pas non plus le doux rabbi de Galilée..."

12. *Qu'est-ce?*, p. 46: "Jésus a été la copie conforme de l'*Urbild* de l'humanité agréable à Dieu (...) Mais Kant referme hâtivement la porte entrebâillée sur l'être du Christ."

13. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 82: "D'une survie personnelle et spirituelle du Christ, d'une vie mystique et sacramentelle dans le Corps de l'Église, du Maître de l'Histoire, Kant ne sait rien. Le Christ est le Maître et le Modèle moral, et de l'Histoire seulement un «héros»."

14. *Qu'est-ce?*, p. 43: "[L'*Idea Christi*] ...ou le Christ en idée...a été mise en circulation principalement par Karl Rahner (...). Elle se réfère directement au Kant de *La Religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, mais on sait que ce petit livre remarquable évite soigneusement le nom du Christ..."

first who possesses therein the consanguinity of man and God.”¹⁵ As a consequence, “Christianity is as such anticipatory, proleptic Doctrine of Science...”¹⁶ The problem is that the Messiah is not an idea or a science that can be taught, but a reality. The being of the Messiah does not principally consist in his knowledge of the world, but in his love of the world.

The second error to be avoided, the Hegelian error, is not wrong because it places God too far from the world, at a transcendental remove, but because it places God too close to the being of the world, in its more extreme moments, even dangerously collapsing the two. The fallacy of coextension, then, does not know how to handle the being of God apart from the being of the world (or history) and vice versa, verging upon the collapse of each into the other. The problem can be summarized thusly, “For Hegel, the creation of the world was never a thorn in the side of the system.”¹⁷

The world is part of the divine concept (*Begriff*), in fact, its very instantiation. The question, for Hegelians (who may or may not be in line with Hegel), is not how God could create, but how God could have not created. Had God not created, which seems impossible for a Hegelian, then this would be tantamount to God denying God’s own existence, which can only find its being in the world, in the creation. Tilliette explains, a bit less polemically and more descriptively,

The generative axiom of Hegel’s system is, in effect, that Revelation is exhaustive: God is not jealous; he is the *Ens manifestativum sui*, there is nothing hidden in him. God is so evident that there is no call to inquire into the mysteries of the divinity, his deeds and actions. That is why there is no reason to wonder (...) about the creative Act.¹⁸

The coincidence, not just co-belonging, of God’s being and God’s revelation according to Hegelianism – whether Hegel himself was Hegelian in this way is a question that exceeds the parameters of this work – has consequences both for the creation of the world and for the generation of the Son. Contra Kant, the Hegelian God not only has a Son but, arguably, could not avoid generating a Son, but what is lost thereby is the ability to separate each of God’s acts from one another in any real way. Tilliette thus concludes, “Although distinct, the generation of the Son and the creation of the world fade into one another.”¹⁹ As

15. *Qu’est-ce?*, p. 38: “...le Jésus-Christ de Fichte est le premier docteur de la science, le premier *Wissenschaftslehrer*. Il est en effet l’inventeur de la *Doctrine de la Science*, le premier qui en ait perçu et mis en œuvre l’idée-force, l’intuition vive, à savoir la parente originelle, la consanguinité de l’homme et de Dieu.”

16. *Qu’est-ce?*, p. 39: “Le christianisme est ainsi une Doctrine de la Science anticipatrice, proleptique...”

17. Xavier TILLIETTE, “Trinity and Creation,” *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 28 (2001) (henceforth abbreviated “Trinity”), p. 307.

18. “Trinity,” p. 308.

19. “Trinity,” p. 310.

a general principle, “Hegelian speculation never dissociates what representation frequently sets forth as *membra disjecta*: the Trinity and Creation; the infinite and the finite”²⁰. More preferable would be not only a gap between the inner divine life or economy and the act that brings about a world outside itself, but also a gap between the actuality of the generation of the Son and its possibility as well as between the actual creation and its possibility. In other words, not only should generation and creation be conceivable as distinct acts – yet without having to affirm that God has acted twice rather than in one eternal act – but with respect to each of these acts, there should be no necessary transition *a potentia ad actum*. There could have been nothing: no Word of God and no creation. More desirable is that God is free both to generate and not-generate, to create and not-create. In short, how does God accomplish multiple effects in one act, and how does God act freely rather than only as a necessary overflow of God’s own nature? The Hegelian model, a prime instance of the fallacy of co-extensiveness, is unequipped to handle these questions.

To recapitulate, in one short formula, Tilliette suggests that for Hegelians, “The Absolute has a history; the Absolute is a history”²¹. The task here will rather be to conceive of how God has a history without coinciding with this history, to conceive of how God has effects with which God does not coincide in order that divine simplicity is not ruined thereby. How, in other words, can God have a history, yet without undergoing any becoming within Godself, much like a resolute person who, although having a history, is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. It is a becoming that takes place outside a resolute person, rather than within their being, so to speak, that constitutes their history.

If Hegelian dialectics operates according to the maxim “no God without the world,” then this “divine tragedy offers only a benign negativity...”²² It is only a negativity that is part of the divine economy, hence not a real loss, but self-alienation only as a means to self-reconciliation. In this theodicy, there is arguably no real risk, but everything is assured from the beginning. Everything is assured from the beginning, because, like Kant, all movement is only a movement of the Idea or in Idea. Everything happens in and for thought; nothing happens outside these safe borders. Tilliette’s final pronouncement, then, is that for Hegel – although it is surely safer to say “Hegelianism” – “the Cross is the cross of the concept, and the Passion is the rift of unhappy consciousness.”²³ The two errors to avoid, then, can be summed up as one.

20. *Ibid.*

21. “Du dieu,” p. 467: “L’Absolu a une histoire, l’Absolu est une histoire.”

22. *Le Christ de la philosophie*, p. 188: “Elle n’offre qu’une négativité bénigne si on la compare à la divine tragédie de Hegel.”

23. *Qu’est-ce?*, p. 55: “...la Croix est la croix du concept, et la Passion est le déchirement de la conscience malheureuse.”

The event of the cross must be something that takes place outside of thought. It is not an event that takes place under the legislative surveillance of thought and consciousness, lest it, the cross, be unable to pronounce judgment upon and heal the same.

We are now in a position, then, to sketch a Tilliette-inspired philosophical christology.

An Attempt at an Ontology of Kenosis: Schelling, Henry and Weil

The philosophical Christology I will propose is not a reproduction of Tilliette's own, as Tilliette simply does not offer his own philosophical christology, but it does adhere to basic tenets and principles of Tilliette's. This Christology is thoroughly kenotic and stems from Tilliette's readings of F.W.J. Schelling, Michel Henry and Simone Weil, and is arguably more Pauline than Johannine, although there surely nothing in gospel of John, including the Prologue, that would exclude a kenotic reading.

Kenosis does not signify the absence of power, but rather true power, power correctly rather than traditionally conceived, and the signature of its efficacy is emancipation, setting captives free. Such efficacy is precisely the point of Paul's discussion of the principalities and powers that the cross unmasks and throws into confusion. The power of empire, the power of prestige, even the power of death, all are shown to have never really been power at all, but only its dissembling image, a poor counterfeit. These principalities and powers are deflated by the cross, not merely exposed but also deconstructed, one might say, by an act of love in which the Logos of God freely (and unpredictably) assumes the form of a slave. God inhabits the place of human infirmity, becomes identified with the poor, the naked, the ousted, and subjected. The resulting consequence is that the crucified God cannot be implicated in any power based upon violence, i.e. upon a subjugation of others in order to form a hierarchy.

A kenotic subversion of principalities and powers consists of more than a mere reversal. If the Logos has become a slave, this does not mean that the slave may now become the master! Such would only keep a system of reprisals and cyclical violence neatly intact. The God of Jesus the Messiah is beyond the master-slave dialectic. Jesus' death on the cross does not entail any reciprocal response to the original violence that led to it, which would only amount to an inversion of a binary that nevertheless remains entirely in effect. God's response to power-as-force is not a *quid pro quo*, not the exertion of an even greater counter-force. The God of kenosis, of unlimited dispossession, deflates the principalities and powers neither by mimicking them nor by warring with them, but by refusing concurrence. It is a *via tertia*. Having unleashed their energies, the principalities and powers are exposed to have no real power at

all because they cannot finally vanquish the power of unlimited dispossession, of kenotic self-sacrifice. In this sense, power is not vanquished by a counter power and nor does it fizzle out. It operates as normal, but without resistance, thus exposing its operations as vanity.

Tilliette's praise for Schelling, never more effusive than with respect to his christology, perhaps attains its pinnacle in the following passage:

Schelling is the only great philosopher who thematizes kenosis and offers a theology of kenosis, on the basis of a daring and singular exegesis of the hymn of *Philippians*. The salient and original point of Schelling's theory is the adequation of kenosis and the Incarnation in a precise sense that has perhaps not been sufficiently thrown into relief by interpreters: kenosis does not simply effect the mode of abjection in the Incarnation, the *forma servi*, it is the condition and the cause of the Incarnation.²⁴

Kenosis does not just indicate that the *mode* of the incarnation is abjection, but kenosis is the very *condition* of the incarnation; it is *incarnation itself*. The incarnation, I will argue, far from a form of divine abjection, is actually the very means by which the divine is divine, the means by which God is God. The real transvaluation of values is that the incarnation is actually a form of exaltation. The scandal is not simply that God did not lay down divinity in the incarnation, but that divinity *achieves* its pinnacle in the incarnation. This can only be the case, though, if God were not already God in propriety in advance of the incarnation. For God, first, to achieve true divinity in the incarnation means that the subject of the incarnation, properly speaking, can be *neither God nor human*.²⁵ As one commentator has remarked, "In this *Hymn of Philippi*, as Tilliette calls it [...] the exegetical problem of philosophical Christology is developed. Christ is [...] here 'of the form of God' but not God Himself. That is: 'divine and human', i.e. 'neither divine nor human'."²⁶ There is a distinction between God *simpliciter* and existing in the "form of

24. *Le Christ de la philosophie*, p. 184: "Schelling est le seul grand philosophe qui thématise la kénose et offre une théologie de la kénose, sur la base d'une exégèse hardie, singulière, de l'hymne des Philippiens. Le point saillant, original, de la théorie schellingienne, est l'adéquation de la kénose à l'Incarnation, en un sens précis qui n'a peut-être pas été suffisamment relevé par les interprètes: la kénose n'affecte pas seulement le mode humilié de l'Incarnation, la *forma servi*, elle en est la condition et la cause."

25. For a more detailed account of Schelling's christology, particularly its refusal to posit the subject of the incarnation as either divine, human or the synthesis of the two, see Tyler TRITTEN, "Christ as Copula: On the Incarnation and the Possibility of Religious Exclusivism," *Analecta Hermeneutica*, 6 (2015).

26. Steffen DIETZSCH, "Die speculative Vernunft vom Kreuz: Schelling als Christologie," in Steffen DIETZSCH and Gian Franco FRIGO (eds.), *Vernunft und Glauben: Ein philosophischer Dialog der Moderne mit dem Christentum*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006, p. 67: "An diesem, wie Tilliette es nennt, *Philippier-Hymnus* (den Schelling besonders schätze) eröffnet sich das exegetische Problem der philosophischen Christologie. Christus ist für Schelling hier ‚von der Art Gottes‘, aber nicht Gott selbst. D.h.: ‚göttlich und menschlich‘, d.i. ‚weder göttlich noch menschlich‘."

God,” as Paul, in *Philippians*, only speaks of the latter. The incarnation, then, is not a loss of Godhood – it will be the acquisition of Godhood – but it is an abdication of the “form of God.” A lot is at stake in this claim. In Tilliette’s words, “What is important is to place the original and paradoxical character of kenosis-incarnation into relief, to know that the Incarnation reveals true divinity...”²⁷ How can the incarnation, as a loss of the “form of God,” be the act by which God first becomes God? How is it that God does not exist (never existed!) in the form of deity, i.e. as a power, principality or ruler, but instead chooses – and, as will be argued later, has *eternally* chosen – the form of a slave?

Tilliette rightly glosses,

The still standard expression ‘Incarnation of God’ is repugnant to Schelling because incongruent. The change only concerned the passage from one figure to another: a voluntary transition, an attestation of authentic divinity, as this one, who was one with the Father, has come from heaven in full union with the Father, and he has demonstrated in this way that he was God. Condescension is the true name for kenosis; it makes humanity the proof of divinity.²⁸

The “passage from one figure to another,” from the divine figure to the human figure, is actually the passage *to* and not a departure *from* true divinity. “Humanity is the proof of divinity.” Who, however, is the subject who is undergoing this transition from one figure to another, who is *stricto sensu* neither God nor human? Tilliette answers, “Up until the moment of the incarnation the subject of the process is bivalent, μορφή Θεού, neither heavenly nor earthly.”²⁹ Although not explicitly named in this passage, the subject in question is the Johannine Logos. It is the Logos that can be either in the form of God or in the form of humanity. This avoids both Arianism, which presupposes humanity but ultimately denies divinity, and Sabellianism, which presupposes divinity but ultimately denies humanity. The Logos is, properly speaking, neither divine nor human, but these are two forms or two natures that it can bear. The object of kenosis, then, is not God *simpliciter* but only the μορφή Θεού. The Messiah is thus not the *means* by which God is revealed,

27. *Le Christ de la philosophie*, p. 188: “L’important est de mettre en relief le caractère original, paradoxal de la kénose-incarnation, à savoir que l’Incarnation dévoile la vraie divinité...”

28. *Le Christ de la philosophie*, p. 187: “L’expression pourtant courante «Incarnation de Dieu» répugne à Schelling comme incongrue. Le changement n’a concerné que le passage d’une figure à une autre: transition volontaire, attestation de divinité authentique, car Celui qui était un avec le Père est venu du ciel en pleine union avec le Père, et il a démontré ainsi qu’il était Dieu. Condescendance est le vrai nom de la kénose, elle fait de l’humanité le test de la divinité.”

29. “Gott und die Geschichte,” in *Auf der Suche nach dem verborgenen Gott: zur theologischen Relevanz neuzeitlichen Denkens*, Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1987, p. 154: “Bis zum Augenblick der Inkarnation ist das Subjekt des Prozesses zwiegestaltig, μορφή Θεού, weder himmlisch noch irdisch.”

but Jesus the Messiah *is* God revealed, God manifest, the very object, the very *content* of revelation, which is nothing more than God Godself.

The kenotic suffering of a being who is, properly speaking, neither divine nor human also plays the decisive role in accounting for why God is a divine life, i.e. a Trinity. As a divine life, the Father and the Son do not bear incidental relations to each other, but any change in being in the one necessarily implicates a change in the other. Tilliette explains,

It is the paternal sympathy or co-suffering that afflicts the abandonment and the sacrifice of the Son and makes him defenseless. In order, however, to circumvent Patripassianism, one has disregarded or watered down the abandonment of the Son. Divinity has abandoned itself by leaving him. It has externalized itself by externalizing him.³⁰

Although this passage rightly states that the suffering of the Son entails a suffering of the Father, Patripassianism, it is misleading in stating that divinity has been abandoned once the Father forsakes the Son on the cross. To the contrary, as this reading still has to demonstrate, it is this forsakenness that first secures divinity for the Son.

When Tilliette speaks the most lucidly of the relation that co-implicates all changes in the Son also to be changes for the Father, he is typically appealing as much to Michel Henry as to Schelling. He remarks, for instance, “Oetinger’s dictum: God’s ways (or works) have their end in corporeity. Schelling enjoyed repeating this phrase and it is marvelously illustrated in the latest work of philosophical Christology, Michel Henry’s *Incarnation*.”³¹ Turning directly to Henry, he comments, “Michel Henry develops (...) a filial Logology in which the eternal generation of the Son coincides with the self-generation of the Father in the sovereign embrace of the Life that is birth and generativity, *pathos* and affectivity.”³² The Logos’ acceptance of the “form of a slave” and abandonment of the “form of God” is the very event by which the Father acquires a Son, hence the very event by which the Father acquires paternity. The incarnation is thus thoroughly relational rather than substantial act; or, said differently, it is act rather than being. Consequently, there is no being of the Father apart from the incarnation, i.e. the humanity, of the Logos, who, in turn, does not act on his own behalf but only in order to be the revelation

30. Xavier TILLIETTE, “Der Kreuzesschrei,” *Evangelische Theologie*, 43 (1983), pp. 3-15 (8): “Es ist das väterliche Mitleiden, das die Verlassenheit und das Opfer des Sohnes heimsucht und ihn wehrlos macht. Um aber dem Patripassianismus zu entgehen, hat man die Verlassenheit des Sohnes vernachlässigt oder abgemildert. Die Gottheit hat sich selbst verlassen, indem sie ihn verließ, sich selbst entäußert, indem sie ihn entäußerte.”

31. “Trinity,” p. 301.

32. “La christologie philosophique de Michel Henry,” *Gregorianum*, 79 (1998), pp. 369-378 (372): “Michel Henry développe (...) une Logologie filiale, où la génération éternelle du Fils coïncide avec l’auto-engendrement du Père, dans l’êtreinte souveraine de la Vie qui est naissance et générativité, *pathos* et affectivité.”

of the Father. Finally, if God is fully God only in paternity, then sonship, as the condition of paternity, is also the condition of true divinity. Tilliette thus continues, "Concerning the self-generation of the Father... it is the simple correlate of the generation of the Son; the Son is the proof of the paternity of the Father."³³ This is why "the incarnate Son is immediately God..."³⁴, because the Son does not testify to a pre-existent God, but the Son *is* that God, its very *being*. There is no being of God apart from the being of the Messiah, i.e. apart from the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The answer to how God is Father thus also answers the riddle as to why God is a Trinity, i.e. why God contains an inner, relational life. Trinitarianism is not a concession granted to monotheism, but it is the very explication of what it means to say God is One/*monas*. Trinitarianism is not an exception to monotheism, but its very expression. If God were not a Trinity, God would also not be One.

Appealing to Schelling again, Tilliette pronounces,

The generation, which responds to the exigencies of alterity and identity, procures for the Father a Savior who liberates him from chaos (...). In this sense one can say that he makes the Father Father, according to the alchemical expression: *The son of the Son is the one who was the father of the Son*.³⁵

Abysmal Godhead, a chaos without inherent identity, without oneness, is first liberated and brought to its proper identity as God (the Father) through the eternal generation of the Son. This is all well and good, but Schelling, as Tilliette never tires of repeating, lets such insights be obscured by his over-emphasis on the rational representation of the same. Given this criticism, a turn to Weil is in order, who, although a mystic, is nevertheless clearer and more sober than Schelling.

Tilliette valorizes that for Weil the Cross is always sufficient. More than Schelling, perhaps, Weil is faithful to the singularity of the Fact, convinced that the Cross is the judge of reason rather than something that must be transformed into reason in order to assuage its scandalous character. In Tilliette's estimation, "She [Weil] cannot contemplate Jesus without the Cross; his love is the Crucifix, the Crucified; her regard is riveted to the debasement of kenosis."³⁶ This is both thoroughly ontological, having to do with the *being* of Christ as the exhaustive content of revelation, and thoroughly kenotic. To wit:

33. *Ibid.*: "Quant à l'auto-engendrement du Père...c'est le simple corrélat de la génération du Fils, le Fils est la preuve de la paternité du Père."

34. *Ibid.*: "Le Fils incarné est Dieu directement..."

35. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 138: "L'engendrement qui répond aux exigences d'altérité et d'identité procure au Père le Sauveur qui le libère du chaos (...). En ce sens on peut dire qu'il fait le Père, selon le diction alchimiste: *Le fils du Fils est celui qui était père du Fils*."

36. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 426: "Elle ne peut contempler Jésus sans la Croix, son amour est le Crucifix, le Crucifié; son regard est rivé à l'abaissement de la kénose."

“My God, why have you forsaken me?” It is here that Christ is divine, at the height of misfortune where God is absent, in immobility, patience and the endurance of suffering. Christ is the Truth in extreme suffering. It is not the works and miracles (attached to humanity), it is the crucifixion that bears the immediate, flagrant proof of the divinity of Jesus. Kenosis gradually garners victory and darkens the figure of God.³⁷

“It is here” – in kenosis, in suffering and self-abnegation – “that Christ is divine.” It is only in the “darkening of the figure of God” that God is actually revealed, actually manifest, actually God. Tilliette, leaning heavily on Schelling, Henry and Weil, is not as syncretistic as he may seem. Kenosis is the cornerstone.

What Weil adds is the emphasis on emptiness and, eventually, “decreation.” Tilliette exclaims,

It has been remarked that the word “empty” was, with “God,” the word most frequently employed by Simone Weil. (...) She was fascinated by and thereby aspired to this fateful verse: “Man can be one with God only by uniting to a God stripped bare of his divinity [EMPTIED of his divinity]. *To love an impotent God.*”³⁸

That one must become empty in order to be filled with God is a common trope amongst mystical traditions. More scandalous, however, is the notion that God too must become empty in order to be Godself. Moreover, the moment of emptying, even for God, is not followed by a refilling or plenitude. There is nothing Hegelian about this. God does not empty Godself as a means of self-fulfillment, but God remains empty. God did not become impotent for a spell, but God *is* impotent, i.e. God is not the God of powers and principalities but a God who can be solace for the suffering because God too suffers, not as a moment immanent to divine realization, but as origin and goal. God suffers from creation to incarnation. God’s very being *is* the condemnation of the potencies that are, the powers of the world, and a proclamation in favor of those that are not. God deems that which is “as if not” and calls into being what is nought. (I Cor. 7:29-31) Emptiness is greater than plenitude and abdication of power greater than its exhibition and deployment.

Kenosis is not one act that God commits amongst others, but it is the *only* act God performs. God is *actus purus*, hence it is the act that God *is*. Even

37. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 427: “«Mon Dieu, pourquoi m’as-tu abandonné?» C’est là que le Christ est divin, au fond du malheur, quand Dieu est absent, dans l’immobilité, la patience, l’endurance du malheur. Le Christ est la Vérité dans l’extrême malheur. Ce ne sont pas les œuvres et les miracles (rattaches à l’humanité), c’est la crucifixion qui apporte la preuve immédiate, flagrante, de la divinité de Jésus. La kénose gagne de proche en proche et assombrit la figure de Dieu.”

38. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 202: “On a remarqué que le mot «vide» était, avec «Dieu», le plus fréquent chez elle. (...) Elle a été fascinée et comme aspirée par le verset fatidique: «L’homme ne peut être un avec Dieu qu’en s’unissant à Dieu *dépouillé de sa divinité* (VIDÉ de sa divinité). *Aimer Dieu impuissant.*»”

the creation was an act of kenosis. God did not first create in power only secondly to will the incarnation in weakness. Rather, Tilliette informs, "Divine renunciation begins with the creation and extends unto the Cross... God has emptied himself. (...) The Creator 'has withdrawn in order to let us be.' (...) [Weil] invents the term decreation"³⁹ Creation itself is an act of kenosis; God only creates by decreasing Godself.

If God, as tradition has held, were the absolute fullness of being, then there would be no space for another being alongside God. For God to create, therefore, would require that God yield or forfeit his own being. For God to create, God must renounce or decreate himself. Here one can see why the act of creation is an act of love. One might hereby conclude that God loves us too much to exist. If love is letting the beloved be even when the beloved rejects you, then God created the world and decreated himself because he loved it. Love is decreation and decreation is love. To create is not to cause or to produce, but to decreate oneself, to enter repose in order to make space for the other freely to self-create. It is not simply that God loves us too much to exist, but God loves us too much to continue existing, to continue to affirm his existence, to not lay down his life. The death of God on the cross is a continuation, not an interruption, of the act of creation as decreation; both are sacrificial acts of love. The Cross, far from an accident within the life of God, is the very event that deifies God. As Tilliette suggests, "The death on the Cross is only the conclusion of a pain-filled life, of an *actus continuus* of kenosis."⁴⁰ Kenosis is not one act of God, but God's very being.

What is the mystery of the generation, creation and incarnation, which are all but one eternal kenotic act? It would seem that the latter two at least would involve a secret between God and humanity. Tilliette point out, however, that this is also "a mystery between God and God, a divine tragedy."⁴¹ The tragedy is that God can neither simply exist nor not exist. God loves us too much to exist, in which case there would be no room for creation, but also too much not to exist, i.e. to shut us out from his presence, namely, to condemn us to hell. The divine tragedy, the mystery with which God is confronted, is that God must die for us *and* be resurrected for us in order to be our God. God wills this out of love. Everything is done on our behalf; God is, contra Aristotle, *not* concerned with himself. God is the only being who is utterly bereft of *conatus*.

39. *Le Christ des philosophes*, p. 203: "Le renoncement divin commence avec la création et se poursuit jusqu'à la Croix... Dieu s'est vidé. (...) Le Créateur «s'est retiré pour nous laisser être. (...) Elle invente le terme de *décréation*..."

40. *Mythologie comprise*, p. 106: "La mort de la Croix n'est que la conclusion d'une vie peineuse, d'un *actus continuus* de kénose."

41. "Der Kreuzeschrei," p. 11: "Es ist ein Geheimnis zwischen Gott und Gott, eine göttliche Tragödie."

* * *

This study had two aims: 1) to provide a concrete instance of how revelation critiques and enlarges philosophy, of how faith dictates to reason, and 2) to draft an outline of a philosophical christology that would fall squarely within the confines of Tilliette's own operative principles.

To conclude, a kenotic Christology judges the world through a profound and thoroughgoing transvaluation of values, ultimately revealing that far from making an exception of his being, God has never been more Godself than in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. This is foolishness to the Greeks and anathema to the Jews; the Cross is thus a critique of knowledge (philosophy) and power (politics). It is not so much that Athens has met Jerusalem as God is *neither* the God of the philosophers *nor* of religious institution, *neither* Greek *nor* Jewish.

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SUMMARY

This study has two aims: 1) to provide a concrete instance of how revelation critiques and enlarges philosophy, of how faith dictates to reason, and 2) to draft an outline of a philosophical christology that would fall squarely within the confines of Xavier Tilliette's own operative principles. Consequently, if revelation is kenotic, then philosophy must also sketch a general ontology that is also kenotic. In other words, if revelation critiques and enlarges philosophy, then kenosis is not exceptional but paradigmatic and so philosophical ontology and philosophical theology must be kenotic all the way down. This article is an attempt to sketch the latter, i.e. a thoroughly kenotic philosophical theology.

SOMMAIRE

Cette recherche poursuit un double but: 1) montrer, à travers un exemple concret, comment la révélation critique et élargit l'horizon de la philosophie, comment la foi dicte à la raison, et 2) présenter comme en esquisse une christologie philosophique entièrement conforme aux paramètres des principes opératoires de Xavier Tilliette. Par conséquent, si la révélation est kénotique, la philosophie devra aussi penser une ontologie générale qui soit également kénotique. En d'autres termes, si la révélation critique et élargit la philosophie, la kénose ne sera pas exceptionnelle mais paradigmatique, et alors l'ontologie philosophique et la théologie philosophique devront se faire kénotiques en profondeur. Cet article tente de réaliser une esquisse de cette dernière, c'est-à-dire d'une théologie profondément kénotique et philosophique.