

# Kenosis

Christology: How to reconcile the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus?  
One answer has been focused on Kenosis, based on Philippians 2.7

Philippians 2:6-8 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but **emptied**<sup>1</sup> himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point  
of death—  
even death on a cross.

## Strong's Concordance

kenoó: to empty

Original Word: ΚΕΝÓΩ

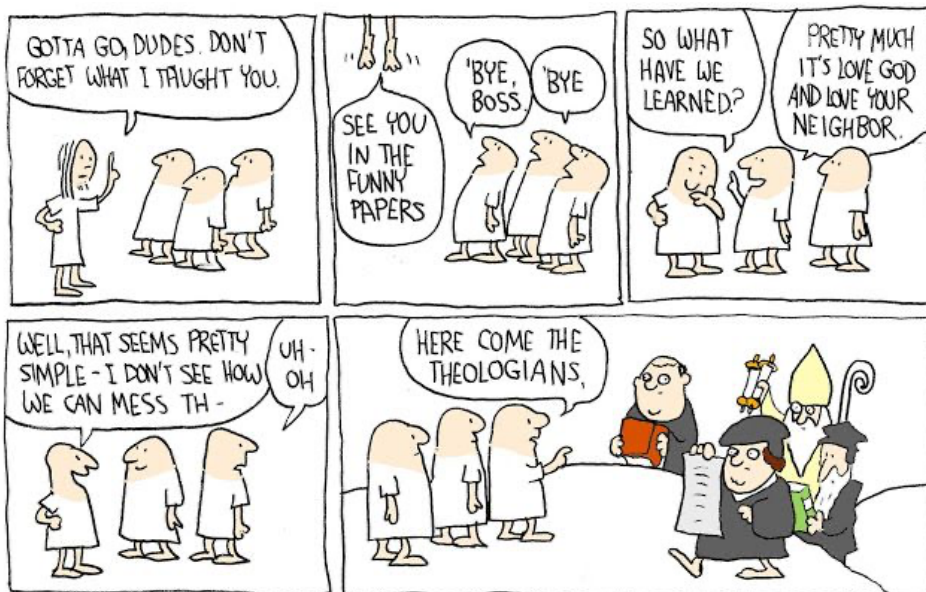
Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: kenoó

Phonetic Spelling: (ken-o'-o)

Definition: to empty

Usage: (a) I empty, (b) I deprive of content, make unreal.



## Of what did Christ empty himself?

Answers that are generally not accepted but have been proposed include, that Christ was emptied of divinity, that Christ was emptied of humanity (Docetism)

Early answers suggested those attributes that were relational to creation, but not in the character of God. Omnipotence was emptied out, but not love.

*That is, the self-emptying is not to be seen as a divestment of deity; on the contrary, it is an expression of deity.<sup>2</sup>*

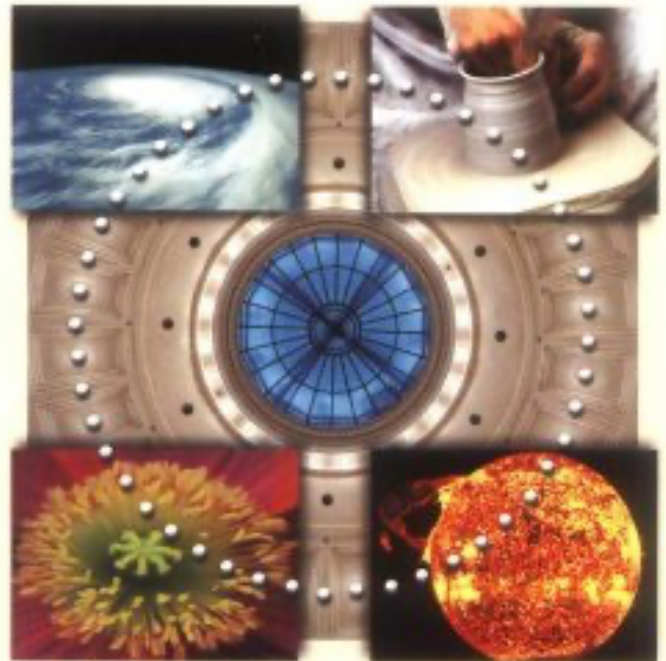
<sup>1</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2758.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/kenosis/>

## How does kenosis express divinity?

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, prior to his execution by the Nazis in 1943, that only a "weak" God could be truly effective in the world. His ideas, though undeveloped, became an important stimulus to the contemporary recovery of a kenotic theology.<sup>3</sup> The development of kenotic ideas was one of the most important advances in theological thinking in the late twentieth century. The key concept, kenosis, refers to God's voluntary limitation of his divine infinity in order to allow room for finite creatures who are truly free to be themselves.<sup>4</sup> Advocates of kenotic theology believe their perspective addresses more adequately than other theological alternatives themes include the integrity of nature (creation and evolution), the problem of evil and suffering, the reality of human freedom, the Christian understanding of the cross, and feminist criticisms of the patriarchal God.<sup>5</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), for example, speculates in *God in Creation* (1985) that God "withdraws himself from himself to himself" in order to make creation possible.



## Kenosis and Theosis

Kenosis is not only a Christological issue but also an ethical one. Proponents of a Kenotic ethic take this passage as Paul using God's humility exhibited in the incarnation as a call for Christians to be similarly subservient to others. Kenosis, relative to the human nature, denotes the continual epiklesis and self-denial of one's own human will and desire. Humanity can also participate in God's saving work through theosis; becoming holy by grace. Kenosis therefore is a paradox and a mystery since "emptying oneself" in fact fills the person with divine grace and results in union with God.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/bible/bible-general/kenosis>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Work-Love-Creation-Kenosis/dp/0802848850>

<sup>5</sup> <https://metanexus.net/creation-and-kenotic-love-descriptive-and-critical-review/>