The Humility of the Eternal Son

The Chalcedonian Definition of 451 never completely resolved one of the critical issues at the heart of Christianity: the unity of the “person” of Christ. In this eagerly awaited volume – the result of deep and sustained reflection – distinguished theologian Bruce Lindley McCormack examines the reasons for this philosophical and theological failure. His book serves as a critical history that traces modern attempts at resolution of this problem, from the nineteenth-century Lutheran emphasis on Kenoticism (or the “self-emptying” of the Son as ‘de-potentiation’) to post-Barthian efforts that evade the issue by collapsing the second person of the Trinity into the human Jesus – thereby rejecting altogether the logic of the classical “two-natures” Christology. McCormack shows how New Testament Christologies both limit and authorize ontological reflection, and in so doing offers a distinctively Reformed version of Kenoticism. Proposing a new and bold divine ontology, with a convincing basis in Christology, he persuasively argues that the unity of the “person” is in fact guaranteed by the Son’s act of taking into his “being” the lived existence of Jesus.

Bruce Lindley McCormack is Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology at the Princeton Theological Seminary.
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The Humility of the Eternal Son

Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon

BRUCE LINDLEY MCCORMACK

Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey
University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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Co. and Ignatius Press for their kind permission to use selected excerpts from their
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For Catriona Keyes McCormack
For God’s Being-ever-greater [das Je-immer-grösser Gottes] is shown precisely [in denying Himself] in the mystery of redemption, in which He empties Himself ever more [das Je-immer-mehr-Nichts-wird] (Phil. 2:7), and in that He is the one who ascends ever higher [der Je höher Aufsteigende] as the one who descends ever more deeply [der Je tiefer Absteigende] (Eph. 4:9). Thus, one transcends oneself [das je-über-hinaus des Menschen] to the degree that one descends with Him and in Him, the one who descends ever deeper, in “service” to the ever greater God.

— Erich Przywara, Crucis Mysterium, 48. Translation by John Betz.
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In the writing of this book, I have accumulated a number of debts which should be acknowledged. The occasion for the first version of this work was the T.F. Torrance Lectures, which I delivered in St. Andrews, Scotland in December 2007. To Thomas Torrance’s son Iain, I am indebted for a great number of kindesses. But my sincere gratitude is to him on this occasion due to the fact that it was his invitation (as the editor of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*) which allowed me to give the very first series of lectures held in his father’s honor. And it is in his edited series that this book now appears.

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This book is dedicated to my daughter, Catriona Keyes McCormack – because her favorite Christian doctrine has always been Christology. Completely understandable in one who likes intellectual puzzles as much as she does.