



December 2025

Dear listener,

This time of year, reflections on the meaning of the Incarnation are abundant. In this letter asking for your financial support, I'd like to relate a few of such timely ideas to the mission of Mars Hill Audio. Since this letter won't be mailed and we won't have to pay for extra postage, it's a bit longer than most year-end letters I've written. But I hope — as you print it, read it, and re-read it — these pages will encourage you to think more deeply about the relevance of the Immensity once cloistered in Mary's dear womb for our cultural lives.

If you've listened to our productions for a while, you may have picked up on one of the dominant motifs in the interviews and commentary we've been distributing. Since before we began work in 1993, I've been interested in understanding the causes and effects of one of the disorientations that afflicts many modern Christians. I believe that there is a long-standing and deep-seated tendency to regard the Gospel as a "religious" message, addressing us as *spiritual* beings, but having few consequences for the shape of our *material* experience, including our cultural endeavors.

The fact of this dualism has been recognized by many scholars and diagnosed in various ways. For example, James Turner — in his masterful 1985 study *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* — calls attention to widespread shifts evident in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period under the influence of ideas articulated by Francis Bacon and René Descartes. Turner observes that reading texts from this era, we witness "a new mental world" struggling to be born. One can discern in the thought from this formative epoch "a new cast of mind: more insistent on the regularity and orderliness of phenomena; more comfortable with tangible, measurable realities than with the unseen and mysterious. . . .[C]oncreteness and precision became more valued attributes of knowledge."

Turner discusses how in the eighteenth century, the new social influence of scientific paradigms ironically encouraged pietism.

The outcome [of this new sensibility] was a schizophrenic conception of God. Intellectual assurance came from the Divine Engineer; personal religious experience assumed the Heavenly Father. European religion had perhaps always latently harbored this distinction, for God straddled the distinct roles of Creator and Savior. But Deism, rational Christianity, physico-theology magnified the differences and pushed the two personalities toward divorce. In strict logic the two were compatible, but psychologically they now stood light-years apart. The personal God retreated into an impalpable spiritual world. The everyday world was left to the Designer God, drifting ever closer to identity with the anonymous forces of nature.

Turner recognizes that the theology of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Evangelicals “required a warm, active, personal God. One could hardly pour one’s soul out to a natural law.” But Evangelicals “accepted the divided God of the Enlightenment. . . . The bifurcation of God’s role allowed them to accept God’s impersonal action in all things natural while preserving His personality and immediate loving care in all things spiritual.” And most tragically, “they helped to diffuse this bifurcated idea of God throughout American culture.”

James Turner and other historians and sociologists have helped me and many other readers understand the historical shifts that embedded this dualism in modern intuitions and institutions. But the work of a number of theologians has provided crucial tools to perceive the doctrinal depth of our inability to integrate Creator and Redeemer in our thinking about God. One of those thinkers whose work has been immensely valuable to me is the late David L. Schindler. In a 2002 article in *Pro Ecclesia*, he lamented the fact that American Christianity has been driven by a “dualism that undergirds a conception of salvation as individualistic and, as it were, world-less.” In summary, radical secularism in America was the result of the fact that “Christians have been careful watchdogs of morality and inner-churchly piety

even as they have largely given away the orders of space, time, matter and motion – and indeed the entire realm of the body and bodiliness, and of the artifacts and institutions in and through which space, time, matter, and motion become human culture.”

Schindler’s analysis also describes a schizophrenic conception of God, “the God of natural reason and the God of supernatural faith.” And that division proceeds from a belief in the radical separation between nature and supernature. The cosmos is understood as “neutral” or “dead” stuff, intrinsically indifferent to God. God is recognized as Creator, but his Creation is “essentially blind and dumb until appropriated as an instrument of pious choices.” As a result, even the most pious *use* of the cosmos is an arbitrary *imposition* on the cosmos. The rationality with which we perceive Creation is not guided by an awareness that creation is the work of a trinitarian God “and destined already in its constitutive created structure to share in God’s trinitarian love and beauty, and through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15-18).”

The dualism characteristic among modern Christians is evident in what sociologist Christian Smith has labeled “Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism.” Its antidote requires better thinking about God (as Trinity) and Creation. I’ve somewhat playfully designated this cure as “Metaphysical, Eschatological Trinitarianism.” We need a better account of *what things are* (metaphysics) and *what history’s end is* (eschatology), rooted in a more confident and consequential affirmation of Creation’s intrinsic connection with Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Incarnation story begins with the Annunciation, where the life-giving work of the Spirit is highlighted. With the birth of the Son the *Logos* is made flesh. When during Epiphany we celebrate the baptism of this second Adam, the Father and the Spirit are both evident to eyes and ears above the waters. But we must remember in each of these episodes that the Redeemer of the world is also its Creator.

John Betz, who talked with me on Volume 166 of the *Journal* about his book *Christ the Logos of Creation*, warns of the danger of (dualistically) “conceiving of Christ exclusively in terms of our salvation.” We lose sight of the constant refrain in Scripture that “Christ as the Logos is the one through whom all things are made (John 1:3), in whom we continue to ‘live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28), and to whom all things finally refer as their beginning and end (Rev 1:8).”

Betz observes that while we may affirm the truth articulated in these verses,

we are no longer struck by it. Like a cliché we hardly give it a thought, though it may be the most astounding thing ever said: that through the one incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth *all things were made*. And just in case we were not struck by it the first time, it is *repeated* – not just once but twice [in John 1] within a span of ten verses: first in the seemingly superfluous clause that ‘without him nothing was made that was made’ (v. 3) and then in verse 10, which again states that ‘the world was made through him.’ Nor is this all. For as the rest of the Johannine corpus makes clear, the same Logos is also the *telos* – the end and goal – of all things. As Christ *twice* says in the Apocalypse, he is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8; 22:13).

Later in his book, Betz declares that “not knowing how to connect Christology to the doctrine of creation, or how to preach Christ as the Lord of creation, we tend in practice to separate the doctrine of creation from the doctrine of redemption – although, according to Scripture, creation from the beginning was never anything other than a ‘plan’ laid down before all ages ‘to gather up all things in Christ, all things in heaven and on earth’ (Eph 1:10)”

So how *do* we connect Christology to the doctrine of Creation? For Betz, as for others, it begins by recognizing the depth and breadth of the significance of the word *Logos*. Translating that complex Greek word as “verbum” or “Word” obscures the richness of Christ’s identity. In the script on Volume 166 in which I introduced John Betz, I quoted from a lecture given by Peter

Kreeft in which he rang the changes on the meaning of *Logos*. Here's what Kreeft explained:

That Greek word *logos* has literally dozens of meanings, but one of them is something like 'the ultimate truth about the nature of all things,' or 'the mind of God.' John first says: 'In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God.' One of the things that *logos* means is reason or mind or thought or inner word, and your thoughts are one with you. They *are* you and yet they are *with* you. The thinker and his thought are both one and two, so it's a useful analogy.

Next, John makes the astonishing statement that this *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us; eternal truth got born from Mary's womb. . . . That equation of Jesus and the *Logos* is a double expansion, a double moreness. It claims that Jesus is more than he seems to be, he's more than a human being, he's the *Logos*. And it also says that the *Logos* is more than it seems to be. It's not just an abstract impersonal truth; it is a divine person who became human. . . . The word has dozens of related meanings but they can be brought under three headings I think: metaphysical, psychological, and linguistic.

Logos means, first of all, realness, authenticity, truth, intelligibility, meaning, essence, form, order, structure, purpose, point, relationship, unity, principal, or universal. It means all of those things, and that's just a third of its meaning. It means also, in the second place, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, sagacity, intelligence, thought, explanation, reason, or logic: the human psychological internalization of the first *logos*, the metaphysical *logos*.

Finally it also means word or words: language, speech, communication, revelation, expression, manifestation, argument, discourse, testimony, witness, or explanation. *Logos* number three is a mind's externalization of *logos* number two, as *logos* number two is a mind's internalization of *logos* number one.

In light of this array of meanings, in his book, John Betz refused to translate *logos* as “word”: “[W]hen *logos* is taken without further ado as ‘word,’ we tend to conceive of Christ exclusively as the Father’s Word and forget that Christ is *also* creation’s Word, that is, its principle, ground, pattern, goal, and very reason for being.”

Here the work of Maximus the Confessor (579–662) is especially helpful. Maximus argued that each created being has its own *logos* in the sense of essence or form. And since, as St. Paul preached (I knew we’d get to Mars Hill one way or another), in God all things live and move and have their being, the *logos* of each created being is interwoven with the life of God. Rowan Williams summarizes Maximus’s ideas at this point in his book *Christ the Heart of Creation*:

Maximus explores in depth the relation between the eternal Logos and the *logoi* of finite substances, between the eternal life of God as active and creative intelligence and the diverse structures of intelligible life that make up the finite universe, the sum total of finite natures. The *logos* of any particular nature is its participation in the life of the eternal Word; every finite kind reflects one way in which the eternal Logos’s life can be imitated or rather expressed in finite intelligible form. But this means that the more a created nature moves towards its optimal actuality, the closer it is to the Creator; and the harmonious diversity of the finite order when it is acting as it should is in its entirety a reflection of the unity of the eternal Logos in whom exist inseparably all the multiple modes in which eternal being and intelligibility can be mirrored. Thus for humanity to be fully human is not only for it to be aligned with its own natural *logos* but also for it to exist in optimal relation with *the* Logos. This is of course true of all finite creatures; but what makes humanity unique in creation is that it is created with the capacity to mediate the Logos’s own unifying agency within creation. Humanity’s vocation is not simply to be optimally human in the sense of exemplifying its natural qualities as perfectly as possible, but to be actively engaged in the harmonizing of the created order as part of a ‘liturgical’ service offered to God. We

could put this more loosely by saying that humanity's calling is to be freely active in a certain way, to be more than 'just' natural. And where this vocation has been refused and overlaid by human sin, what has to be restored is the capacity of finite human agency to choose and act as it should.

In his book's concluding chapter, Williams connects several streams of theological reflection in a passage that reminded me – in its substance – of the final lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins's *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*:

for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Here is Rowan Williams's more amplified description of what it is that makes Hopkins's poem true. Take time over the coming days to unpack how he demonstrates that Christ – Creator and Redeemer – is the hope of temporal as well as eternal glory.

Christology is a key to the logic of creation because Christ appears as the *perfectly creaturely*: the unlimited, unconditioned reality of the divine Word animates within creation the active, energetic interweaving of intelligible life that makes finite reality a *universe*, not a chaos; and that interweaving is focused upon the life in which the Word is uninterruptedly active as the determining form of a human identity, realizing what humanity itself is called to be. Finite life "in itself" would be simply the bare reality of process, change and becoming; but it is never simply "in itself". It is always related to the infinite cohesive agency that is the Word, which gives finite existence a *history* of responding to the gift of infinite love and invitation. Finite reality never just – as we might say – lies around simply existing; it is, in its variegated response to the gift of the Word's continuing and living engagement with it, always related to the infinite and thus always caught up in *analogy*: that is to say, it is always capable of being understood in terms of greater or lesser alignment with the infinite

movement of God to God that is the giving of life between Father, Son and Spirit, the giving *from* each of these “moments” in God *to* all in the divine circulation of life. Temporal existence is indeed “the moving image of eternity”, but of an eternity that is always a plurality in unity, a plurality of reciprocal gift. Thus, where the relation between God and God is most fully embodied within creation, we can see created reality as such in its proper light, as the analogue of that inner-Trinitarian movement. This is why, in embodying the Word’s relation to the Father, in embodying what is the hypostatic distinctiveness of the Word within the Trinity, Jesus embodies also the maximal and optimal relation of creature to Creator.

I realize that the excerpts above are deep and difficult. But if the cultural challenges we face are also deep and difficult to understand, I’m convinced we need all the help we can get. That’s the reason my interviews in the past decade or so have required more demanding listening than the breezier exchanges on the cassette tapes that launched this maturing project.

And on that note, I’ll conclude, and thank you as a Mars Hill Audio listener (and, I hope, supporter) for your interest in attending to the wise guests I’ve been privileged to engage for many years.

Advent blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Myers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ken Myers
Host and Producer