

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores ideas of kenosis by engaging various partners in the discussion, ultimately focusing on the religious and theological context of Bulgaria. The significant kenotic discussions of the 19th and early 20th centuries, both on the continent and among English-speaking theologians, as well as recent and contemporary contributions, both from the Eastern and Western traditions, are used to establish the framework and nature of the early and subsequent kenotic debates. These are then employed as the larger context, in which Bulgaria joins the kenotic discourse, with the aim of unearthing kenotic ideas and references in the Bulgarian religious landscape and the divine images they convey.

The thesis engages with and analyses texts in the Bulgarian language, especially various theological works and textbooks, academic journals, Biblical commentaries, liturgical texts, hymnals and canticles. Once kenotic references, or their lack thereof, have been established, the driving question becomes what these reveal concerning theological and divine images, as well as the possible reasons for the lack of a rigorous engagement with the kenotic concept. The thesis then moves to consider the relationship between ideas of kenosis and the values and influences of a domineering power, as embodied during the Communist regime in Bulgaria (1944-1989), in terms of the formation of images of God, especially on issues of vulnerability, absolute power and control.

The study undertakes the important aspect of extending ideas and terms of kenosis beyond the Christ-event, which is the starting point for a kenotic discussion. Compiling a category of substitute terms and social metaphors, that can be described as kenotic in nature, enables the research to trace such instances of kenotic behaviour in Bulgarian socio-historical realities. The aim is not simply to identify these but to bring to the surface an underlying and unifying vision, which is described as deeply Biblical and kenotic, namely, a high moral vision, throughout different historical epochs, with their different political and social narratives.

This study aims to stimulate and invigorate a robust discussion on ideas of kenosis in Bulgaria, from the theological and philosophical perspective on the one hand, as well as the experiential and communal on the other, in order to enrich and benefit the faith and praxis of the believing community.