

[1] "Christ emptied himself of His deity"

The problem with this answer is that it conflicts with a number of scriptural assertions of Christ's deity while in His incarnate state, including assertions of His omnipotence, omniscience, eternal self-existence, full deity, activity in preservation of all things, authority to forgive sins and raise the dead, equality with the Father, union and identification with the Father, and right to receive worship. "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form." (Col. 2:9)

[2] "Christ emptied himself of His divine attributes, but not His divine essence"

This answer has two problems: one, in its theoretical formulation; the other, in its practical application. The theoretical problem lies in its separation of attributes from essence. If by "attributes" is meant "external manifestation or expression", perhaps a relative distinction of this kind could be made. Or if by "attributes" one means only what men attribute to God in terms of what they conceive or think or imagine Him to be, in distinction from what He actually is, then that is something different again. But the term "attributes", in the history of the doctrine of God, has been used rather consistently to refer to divine characteristics, qualities, or perfections. These characteristics are characteristic of God himself, as He has revealed himself to us. And when we see these self-disclosures of who and what God is, we understand that God is telling us about himself. To describe what He actually and essentially is, we use terms like "nature", and "being", and "essence". Cornelius Van Til puts it this way: ". . . when God tells us about his attributes he is telling us about himself. Every bit of his revelation shows man something of the nature of the essence of God." (*An introduction to Systematic Theology*, unpublished syllabus, 1955, p. 170). In the Class Notes for *Systematic Theology II* the author of the present Notes has offered the following definition: "The attributes of God are those constant characteristics, qualities, or perfections of God's nature, being, or essence, which are revealed in the scriptures and (to some extent and degree) in the created universe." The point of these quotations is that God's essence or nature is known by His attributes. His attributes describe His essence. His attributes are qualities of His essence.

At this point the subject-object distinction has value. For if we attempt to describe the essence of an object, we describe it in terms of its attributes, or qualities, or characteristics. In such a case, however, we are attributing to the object those qualities which we believe it to possess. The movement of thought proceeds from our minds to the object. However, when we attempt to describe the essence of God, we describe Him as a living, personal, self-disclosing subject, in terms of those attributes which He has revealed to us. In such a case we are simply attributing to God those qualities which He attributes to himself. The movement of thought in this case proceeds from God to our minds back to the living subject, God. Thus we come to a decision: when God reveals His attributes to us, either (a) He is telling us (to a partial extent and on a finite level) what His nature or essence actually is; or (b) He is telling us, not what He actually is, but what He wishes us to believe, in order to regulate our lives by it (sometimes called "regulative knowledge"); or (c) He is telling us what He is not, so that we may understand that His essence is ineffable; or