

BAPTISM & BEATITUDE:
TAKING TIME AND PARTAKING OF THE ETERNAL
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Introduction

As creatures of time, all our practices and utterances take time. This also holds for events we consider to be of eternal significance, which occasions the question: What reality is denoted by eternity, such that events that take time for creatures can be said to partake of eternity? To answer this question requires attention to the practices and forms of life in which such concepts as eternity and time are embedded and from which they take their meaning. Taking one practice for reflection, I will approach the relation of time and eternity by analyzing baptism. First I will attend to the grammar of eternity and time in the practice itself, drawing attention to the ways in which baptism requires temporal enactment and at the same time anticipates a future reality as eschatologically present. Baptism, therefore, both takes time and partakes of the eternal.

This implication will lead me to investigate the grammar of eternity as a theological concept. Eternity functions as a regulative concept, operating as a rule for correct speech about events such as baptism and the meaning of such practices. This does not entail that eternity is not metaphysically descriptive. I will argue that eternity is best understood as a name of God's mode of being as Trinity. Because God is triune and is eternity itself, eternity will be seen as a function of God's personhood. The eternal significance of temporal events, then, is recognized not in their *negative* relation to time but in the personal encounter of God in the event.

Finally, I will return to baptism to show how this investigation of eternity resolves the seeming paradox of baptism both taking time and partaking of the eternal. In baptism, it can both be true that the baptizand inhabits a specific moment in time *and* receives as actual the life promised in the eschaton — i.e., beatitude, or the blessedness of fellowship with God. This is possible because this future is none other than the person of God, a gift of God's triune life to creatures. Consequently, what is anticipated as a future experience of created persons can be both future (in the new creation we still await) and present (in the fellowship of the baptized, the Church) because both are effected by partaking of the Trinity, who is the condition and fulfillment of time. By reflecting on the metaphysics of time and eternity together with the practice of baptism, I hope to demonstrate, primarily, that we can make full use of biblical language about baptism without reducing it to metaphor and, secondarily, that theological metaphysics does in fact have a positive relationship to church practice and language. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to reconsider the grammar of eternity, by approaching it in light of the concrete language and practice of Christian baptism.

Baptism, Time, & Eternity

In his lecture fragment on baptism, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, Karl Barth recognizes the dual reference of baptism: it both points back to Christ's baptism and points forward to our

resurrected life.¹ Contained in this dual reference is the event to which Christ's baptism itself points—his own death and resurrection.² So, by enacting this reference to Christ's baptism, the baptizand participates in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-11), emerging from the waters into the life the Spirit constitutes in the Church (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:1-6). There are two elements of baptism on which I will focus. First, baptism is suspended between two temporal points, both of which are united in the one person of Jesus Christ, who is the presence of the eschatological Kingdom. Second, as centered on Christ, baptism is immersion into the triune name of God, for whom Eternality is another name.

Presence of the Future in Christ's Person

Barth argues forcefully that John's baptism derived its meaning from its reference to the coming messiah who would baptize in the Spirit (Mark 1:7-8), and consequently was itself distinct from, though an anticipation of, the baptism of the Spirit.³ What were distinct in John's baptism, however, are united through Christ's baptism and Pentecost, in whom "the divine kingdom has now become an element ... in temporal world-occurrence."⁴ The Christian practice of baptism contains reference to Christ's baptism (and thereby his death and resurrection). In Christ, baptism becomes a concrete practice through which persons receive the Spirit. This is why Paul cannot understand how the baptized believers in Ephesus have *not* received the Spirit (Acts 19:1-3). Theirs was the baptism of John and so was not determined by the christological content of Christian baptism, in which, as Paul's incredulity demonstrates, persons do in fact receive the Spirit.

Baptism itself becomes a personal event, not in the sense of having to do primarily with individuals in their baptism but as receiving its meaning and act from the person of Christ. As Ephesians 4 makes clear, there is only one act of baptism because all baptisms participate in the one baptism of the one Lord (v 4). It is through sharing in the one baptism of Christ that Christians become members of the one body of Christ through the Spirit. Because believers are members of *Christ's* one body, Christ is recognized as the personal *telos* of what baptism accomplishes. This is confirmed by the fact that John foretold of Jesus as the one who would baptize with the Spirit (Matt 3:11). In Christ, baptism becomes a concrete practice through which persons receive the Spirit, and so the act is fulfilled only by the person of Christ himself in and through the acts of the Church.

The second referent of baptism is the future resurrection life. As Laurence Stookey puts it, because "baptism is Christ's initiation of us into his family, its meaning is by no means confined to the time of its administration. Baptism pushes us into the future."⁵ This is made clear in two ways, most directly in Paul's writings. First, baptism is a participation in Christ's death and

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Part 4, trans G. W. Bromiley, ed G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (repr, 1969; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 89-90. Henceforth cited as *CD IV.4*.

² Barth, *CD IV.4*, 72-5.

³ Barth, *CD IV.4*, 69-71.

⁴ Barth, *CD IV.4*, 75-7, quotation from 76.

⁵ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 16.

resurrection (Rom 6:3-11). In partaking of Christ's death and resurrection, Christians are drawn into the new life enabled by the Spirit, a life which is a first fruit of the new creation (Rom 8:23). Second, Christ is the *eschatos Adam* in 1 Corinthians 15:45. In this passage, Paul is writing directly about resurrection life (cf v 42), drawing several parallels between anticipating the resurrection (vv 45-52), sharing in the "last Adam" (read: future or coming; *eschatos Adam*) (v 45), bearing the image of heaven (v 49), inheriting the kingdom of God, and inheriting the imperishable (v 50).

In baptism, the baptizand is united to Christ *in his death and resurrection* and thereby partakes of Christ's nature as the *eschatos Adam*, the man of heaven who transforms those who receive his Spirit into members of heaven, inheritors of the imperishable life of the coming kingdom. This future reference together with the past reference to Christ's own baptism gives content to the practice of baptism, which is ultimately united in the one person of Jesus who is the *telos* of baptism through imparting the Spirit. Because the terminus of baptism is resurrection life in Christ, it takes on an orientation toward the future life achieved in the Spirit. Through baptism, the Church already receives the holiness that will characterize all creation in the eschaton.

Into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

As a christological event, baptism also has a trinitarian shape. So Jesus charged the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19, NASB). The Greek, *baptizontes autous eis to onoma*, invites a slightly different translation: "baptizing them *into the name*." *Eis* has spatial connotations, so that *eis to onoma* gives the sense not simply of baptizing "on behalf of the name . . .," nor "on the authority of" the one named. Rather, it suggests that through baptism one is immersed *into* the life of the named, the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This makes baptism both participatory⁶ and trinitarian, connecting with the synoptic accounts of Christ's own baptism. So when Jesus is baptized in Mark 1, the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and a voice from heaven names Jesus as the Son (vv 9-11). By being baptized into the triune name, Christians participate in Christ's baptism in which they receive the sonship of the *eschatos Adam* in the alighting of the Spirit and the delight of the Father.

The final goal of beatitude is realized through baptism, in which one participates in the triune life of God, whose fellowship *is* the coming and promised kingdom. Baptism itself is a particular, finite event in time. And yet through immersion into the triune God, the baptizand partakes of the

⁶ I mean "participatory" here in an ontic sense—in that the event itself is constituted by its share in the ontologically prior and fundamental act of Christ's baptism—and not in an intentional or active sense. The baptizand does not "participate" in the sense that they must obtain a certain cognitive/intentional state or contribute to the action, for this would preclude infant baptism and the baptism of persons with severe cognitive disabilities, neither of which do I wish to exclude from baptismal practices. Thanks to Matthew Codd and Brent Peterson for pointing out the ambiguity of the language here.

eternal life promised to God's people.⁷ Baptism, then, is oriented toward *theosis*, participation in the triune life. This participation is initiated as the baptizand is brought into the ecclesial fellowship of God's new people. Sanctification begins in the reception of the Spirit, which paradigmatically occurs at baptism. By being initiated into the new life of God's priestly kingdom, the healing of sanctification is effected and continues throughout one's life, leading up to final *theosis* in the eschaton.

The Grammar of Eternity & the Eternal, Triune God

By recognizing the participatory and eschatological nature of baptismal practice, we can see that baptism has both an immanent and a transcendent structure. "Its *telos*," as Barth says, "is transcendent."⁸ Robert Jenson articulates clearly the crux of the dual temporal/eternal structure of baptism when he says:

What does the believer go on to, after baptism? The needed insight is surely: short of the End, the believer does not go on to anything after baptism, for baptism is initiation into the gate-community [the Church] after which there is only the Kingdom. Short of the End, the believer never advances beyond his or her baptism but instead falls behind it and must catch up to it.⁹

And herein lies the problem of eternity and time to which I want to attend. What must the nature of time and eternity be for such descriptions to be true? If it is difficult to make sense of Jenson's description, in which baptism achieves a reality beyond which one cannot progress—short of the End—then is his description itself wrong or is there a preconceived conception of time and eternity that must be supplanted? If my argument above concerning baptism's eschatological and trinitarian character is correct, it is more likely that our conception of time and eternity needs to be adjusted to correspond with the reality of the baptismal event.

I will argue that our conception of time has been over-determined by the model of the line.¹⁰ This forces eternity to be modeled *against* the temporal line, apophatically, as either a line with no terminal points (unending extension, possibly without duration depending on the metaphysics of God at play) or as an extensionless point. In contrast, I will argue that time is a function of the

⁷ Martin Luther provides helpful clarification here, when to the question, "How can water do such great things?" he responded, "Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things." See Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," in *The Small Catechism*, <http://catechism.cph.org/en/sacrament-of-holy-baptism.html>.

⁸ Barth, *CD IV/4*, 69.

⁹ Robert W Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 2: *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 297. Henceforth cited as *ST 2*.

¹⁰ It has been the fruit of such classic studies as Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Rev Ed, trans Floyd V Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), to present a non-cyclical understanding of time in Judeo-Christian thought. Cullmann thereby *prefers* the model of the line. While I am questioning the metaphysical usefulness of the linear view, I believe the more basic point that Christians reject a cyclical view of time remains valid; cf Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 51-61.

life of creatures, who receive their temporal liveliness from the God who lives as Creator, Sustainer, and Perfecter. Creaturely time arises as encompassed within the eternal life of the Triune God, who by the self-gift of the three Persons constitutes the temporal poles of creation.

Linear Time & Eternity

We have come to view time as a linear progression of events or possibly as a vector, a quantity with a direction and magnitude (in this case, a line that may have a beginning point but has an “arrow” directing toward the future). In many ways this is a helpful and irreplaceable model. By viewing time as a line, we are able to produce a standard of measurement for tracking time as an irreversible series, we enable technological advance, and have overcome a view of time dominated by the cycles of nature.

While the linear model is a helpful heuristic, it is not as helpful for metaphysical description. Linear time assumes that time is analogous to space in at least one manner, it is extended geometrically. Consequently, a succession of events is interpreted as a succession of points plotted *within* time as if time is a container. But time is not analogous to space in certain important respects. For example, to move from one point in space to another, one must traverse the intermediary points, but to move from one point in time to another there is no set of intermediary points one must traverse. Time is not restricted to our technology for measuring time.

Often, for example, time is instead a function of our personal relationships. We say, “When Sally arrives, we will have coffee together.” And so when Sally in fact arrives, we can then declare, “It is time for coffee!” While the interval between these two utterances can *a posteriori* be measured, the structure of the events are not finally determined by the *metric* of time but by the *topology* of time—the ordering and ranking of events.¹¹ Neil MacDonald distinguishes these two forms of time, explaining that topological time, or the ordinal scaling of events (i.e., applying “ordinals” or a sequence of numbers to events), is the more basic metaphysical form of time. Metrical time, by contrast, presupposes a standard of measurement for determining the interval scaling of events.¹² Taking the linear model of time as more than a heuristic runs the risk of conflating metrical and topological time, neglecting the metaphysical basis of time in the topological structure of events.¹³ In baptism, metrically distinct events—rising from the water and rising to resurrection life—are brought together, as was demonstrated in the last section. If the topological/metric distinction is recognized, these metrically distinct events might be seen

¹¹ It should be noted, and I will argue more for this below, that ordering and ranking does not exclude the simultaneity of events, which is why topological time is disanalogous to space.

¹² Neil B MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel: Systematic Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 11-13.

¹³ MacDonald’s own use of this distinction is in clarifying the first and fourth days of creation. On day one God creates light and thereby creates the possibility of time, i.e., of topological succession; on day four God creates the heavenly bodies by which time is measured, thereby creating metrical time. MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel*, 13.

as identified in a topological sense, insofar as they are both primarily oriented to the Person who effects them.

The linear model also creates theological problems. If time is a *container* within which temporal beings and events are located, then God's relation to time, as an eternal being, is understood as either inside or outside this temporal "space." Both options, however, tend toward a flatly apophatic response. On the former, God is "within" time but is interminable, everlasting time. So, the relevant character of eternity is its negation of the terminal points of origin and end. On the latter interpretation, God is "outside" time and is thereby the direct negation of the *extensional* character of time. As the negation of extension, eternity is a single point—an eternal NOW.

Each has a problem that I believe can be overcome only with the recognition of the metaphysical unsuitability of the linear model. First, eternity as everlasting time situates God within a metaphysical space. As an occupant of this "space," God is dependent on that space for the temporal character of God's existence. But if God is dependent on something, God is not the sufficient reason for all of reality. As the only Creator, upon whom all things depend for their existence, God is the sufficient reason for all being, *including God's own self*. Consequently, God cannot be dependent on something else, and therefore God should not be understood as contained within a metaphysical space.

Second, if eternity is understood as timelessness—the total negation of time's linearity—this absolutizes the temporal order as something entirely distinct from God. Construing God as an absolute and simultaneous NOW, the succession of events that constitute the timeline of creation's history is understood as eternally present and simultaneous to God. Consequently the entire series is complete, questioning the dynamic, tensed nature of time.

In both of these views of eternity, the ability for God to act in baptism to effect a future/eternal reality is compromised. For God to make a future reality present would then be either for God to disrupt and coerce temporal events or a sheer impossibility, both of which would unhelpfully force the dual temporal reference of baptism to be reduced to metaphor. To recognize that in baptism the Church genuinely participates in the eschatological life of the Kingdom requires a more trinitarian and dynamic conception of eternity, in which God's eternality is not pitted against time but seen as the personal source of time.

Trinity & Eternity

So the problem with linear time is that, when taken as the paradigm, it collapses multiple senses of time (topological and metrical) and problematizes a positive relation of eternity with time. My approach will be to begin with a constructive understanding of eternity as metaphysically prior to time. With this reconception of eternity in hand, a less restrictive understanding of time and its relation to eternity is possible. My approach will be two-fold: first, I will begin with Boethius' definition of eternity and then suggest treating Eternality as a divine name, a word by which we name the unique mode of God's being. Second, I will return to the topology of time as a feature of personal encounter, namely the Triune Persons' immanent interrelations. Third, I will argue

that because creation is an act of the Triune God, all three poles of creaturely time are derived from God's personal triune address to creatures.

Eternity, Simplicity, and Divine Naming. As Boethius classically defined it, "Eternity is the total, simultaneous and perfect possession of interminable life."¹⁴ Or as Brian Leftow translates more plainly, eternity is "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."¹⁵ This has been the favored starting point for traditional reflection on eternity. Even Karl Barth, who offered a massive rethinking of eternity through the doctrine of the Trinity, affirmed Boethius' definition.¹⁶ This is only possible, however, if the definition is properly understood. As Leftow argues, the definition is compatible with both a "limitless timelike ... extension" and the model of the point.¹⁷ So the definition itself does not collapse into a presumed framework derived from a linear model, although if one begins with a favored linear conception of time and eternity, one's interpretation of the definition will be colored. Instead of interpreting Boethius' definition by beginning with an understanding of temporal life, I will start with eternity proper, focusing especially on the phrase *illimitable* or *interminable life*.

"Illimitable or interminable life" is open to several interpretations. Illimitable and interminable both suggest something that is unbounded, without beginning and end, and having no external terminal points. These are ways of expressing that something is *infinite*. Notice that every word used here has some form of negation. Each *denies* that whatever boundaries are appropriate to the root concept apply to eternity. This is the *via negativa*, the way of negation, whereby concepts are purged of unfitting elements before being applied to God. Included in this approach is the *via affirmativa*, or the way of affirmation, whereby the positive aspect of the concept is affirmed of God after the limitations have been removed. Finally, Thomas Aquinas recognized in his analogical approach to language about God the need for a third mode of applying words to God: the *via eminentiae*, or the way of eminence, whereby the word used of God is applied in a higher or more excellent way—a way fitting divine being.¹⁸

¹⁴ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14328/14328-h/14328-h.htm#Page_255. The translation I have used is from George Hunsinger, "Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000), 199.

¹⁵ Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 147.

¹⁶ Cf Hunsinger, "Mysterium Trinitatis," 189-90, 197-203.

¹⁷ Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 147. See also my discussion above on linear time.

¹⁸ On the three ways in analogy, see Anselm K Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter Between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 245-7. For a more extensive discussion of analogy in Aquinas, see W Norris Clarke, "Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language About God," in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 123-149. As will be discussed, Aquinas is influenced by the tradition of divine names through Dionysius. See Brendan Thomas Sammon, *The God Who is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), passim, esp 266-70, 275-8.

To derive a concept of eternity that is not merely a negation of a prior conception of time, an interpretation in terms of the *via eminentiae* is needed. What is the infinity of God's eternal life as it is a perfection in itself and not simply in its difference from creaturely life? In commenting on Gregory of Nyssa's innovation on the concept of infinity, David Bentley Hart provides a compelling possibility: "the infinite is ... utter positivity and utter plenitude."¹⁹ The infinite is not simply the negation of the finite, but is understood in the way of eminence as "utter positivity and plenitude." Plenitude and abundance are especially apt positive descriptions of God's infinite nature because they point to the lack of boundaries in God as due to a relevant quality of God's *being* rather than to a difference between God's being and creaturely being.

There is a tradition in theology that practices the *via eminentiae* through using words as names for God's essence rather than as properties or predicates.²⁰ As Brendan Sammon glosses, "divine name' refers to a *phenomenon* that identifies the communication of a divine perfection into the created order."²¹ And again, "a divine name identifies a perfection of God that proceeds from his superessential plenitude in the intelligible order manifesting itself through various existential phenomena."²² In Aquinas' reception of this tradition through Dionysius, in one manner of naming God through God's self-communication to creatures, it is the essence of God that is named.²³ "Eternal" is a concept which functions as a divine name, applied to God to express the abundance and plenitude of God's very essence.

As a name of the divine essence, Eternal is not properly understood as a property God possesses but is strictly identical to God, in whom essence and existence are identical. This follows both from the function of divine names and from the logic of divine simplicity. If God is simple, then for any attribute or name X, if X is properly attributed to God, then God=X-ness. So, if God is properly ascribed eternity, God=Eternality.²⁴ God does not depend on anything other than God for the divine life *or* for the mode of life that God lives. If God is not identical to eternity, then either eternity is a property on which God depends for the relevant quality of God's life or eternity is a metaphysical space within which God exists and is once again dependent upon as the logical precondition of divine life.

Consequently, any use of eternal, eternity, and eternity rightfully has one of two referents: 1) it names the divine essence, such that the plenitude of God's life as it pertains to the category of time is denoted; or 2) it names a self-communication of God's being in the creaturely, intelligible order such that creaturely existence partakes of this particular mode of the divine life (as when the baptizand receives a share in resurrection life).

¹⁹ David Bentley Hart, "Notes on the Concept of the Infinite in the History of Western Metaphysics," in *Infinity: New Research Frontiers*, ed Michael Heller and W Hugh Woodin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 267.

²⁰ See Sammon, *The God Who is Beauty*, 95-120.

²¹ Sammon, *The God Who is Beauty*, 96.

²² Sammon, *The God Who is Beauty*, 113.

²³ Sammon, *The God Who is Beauty*, 277-8.

²⁴ I am following Brian Leftow in this way of putting it. He presents a similar statement as a summary of Anselm in Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 152-3.

The Triune Act of Eternality. More must be said to finally conceive of a positive relationship between God's eternity and finite temporality. My claim is that there is a threefold succession, order, or—more traditionally—*taxis* in God that could be said to have a topological character analogous to time without violating Boethius' definition of eternity when used as a divine name.

The order or *taxis* in God is the relations of the three divine Persons. Trinitarian theology has consistently affirmed that God is one being, three persons. When approaching the three, we use *names* once again—names that denote the actors in the drama of God's work of creation, reconciliation, and perfection. Because these *dramatis personae* are identical to God, the actors are not exhausted by their work toward creatures, contra Sabellius, but are Persons within the Godhead. Hence, the names by which we reference God's threeness are said truly of God *ad intra*. Yet, this naming must be somewhat different from the naming of the divine essence described above, for then the three Persons would collapse into a hidden God "behind" the three. As St Augustine proposed, we name the three Persons according to their relations while we name their shared essence according to the one divine being.²⁵

The Persons are identical to their relations of opposition—they are defined purely by reference to one another. So the Father is, as the principle by which the Son is generated, paternity, or the relation of opposition to the Son. The Son is filiation, the relation of opposition to the Father. And the Spirit is procession from the Father through the Son, as the relation of opposition to both Father and Son and the love which unites them and celebrates their union. In the identification of Person with relation, the distinction of agent and act does not apply. The Father as the act of paternity *is* the person-in-act of generating the Son, and so on. This is what is meant by the category of subsistence relations: each Person is identical in their personhood to the act by which they are a relation to the other Persons.²⁶

As relations of origin, these relations and the *taxis* they constitute have an event-structure—an order: Father→Son→Spirit, Father→Spirit→Son, Spirit→Son→Father, etc.²⁷ These are relations that can be ordered and recognized in their interrelation. Consequently, they are analogous to topological time—time of ordinal scaling, of arranging events in sequence. But their ordering is not absolute and so cannot be mapped on a timeline. In the *taxis* of the three Persons, God is "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."²⁸ God's eternity—or God as Eternality—is the dialogue that happens as the Father speaks a Word, who in the lively fellowship the Spirit

²⁵ St Augustine, *The Trinity*, Volume 5 in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City, 1991), 191-5; Book V, Chapter 1.

²⁶ Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 179-91. For an intriguing adaptation of the concept of subsistence relations, see Robert W Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel about Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1973), 127; and Jenson, *ST* 1:116-9.

²⁷ Which series one includes in their list of possible orders of the Persons has become contentious. I will only make two qualifications here: I do not intend these orderings as exhaustive or exclusive but as illustrative. And if the second ordering does not seem merited to the reader, I recommend the suggestive argument in its defense by Thomas G Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (New York: T&T Clark, 1995).

²⁸ Leftow's translation, *Time and Eternity*, 147.

enacts can speak in return. The Father is the Eternal Whence, the principle of origin, from whom the Son eternally generates and the Spirit proceeds. The Son is the eternal act of uttering, and as such, is Present—the specificity of a life addressed by another. The Spirit is the Eternal Whither, the principle of completion as the perfect dynamism of the fellowship of mutual love and discourse. As Robert Jenson says, “‘Discourse’ is one of [God’s] names.”²⁹ And Discourse is a name for God’s form of life as Eternality. As the three Persons subsist *as* the divine essence, God possesses all at once illimitable life.

Triune Eternity and Creaturely Time. As God’s triune life has an analogous form of topological time, this life is the prior basis of the creaturely experience of time. Just as God’s life is a Discourse among Persons, creaturely being is received through being addressed, made actual as a specific word, and offered time to respond. David Hart once again expresses this analogy suggestively:

Creation’s “series” ... is at an infinite distance from the “order” and “succession” of the trinitarian *taxis* ... but that distance is born of God’s boundlessness: the Trinity’s perfect act of difference also opens ... the space of the gift of analogous being, imparted to contingent beings who then receive this gift.³⁰

That creation has time is a result of God’s sharing of the Whence and Whither of God’s own eternal life with creatures.

Creaturely time, then, is not an impersonal, mechanistic line, which is something like a “space” beings inhabit. Rather it is constituted by the dynamic personal address of the Creator. The past and future do not lie at terminal points fixed at the extremes of a line, but are Persons who address and invite us into the triune life. We are addressed by Father as the giver of our being, of our actuality. We are spoken in the Son, through whom we are given specific content to enact in the present. And we are addressed by the Spirit as the one who offers us freedom and possibility, the opportunity to speak and interpret our lives as variations and improvisations on the content offered in the Son. Temporal life is a finite participation in the infinite Eternality.

Our time has a direction because it has a *telos* in the address of the Spirit. The Spirit perfects created being, drawing us into God’s holy life. This direction is not infinitely distended into the future, as if it rests on an ever-receding horizon. Rather, it is the *telos* that is always drawing creatures *presently* into the Kingdom God is initiating. The Spirit’s address has a now/not-yet character, as do our sanctification and our participation in the Kingdom. Through the initiation of persons into the Kingdom, we genuinely do experience new holy life presently. Yet, only in the eschaton will this be completed. So by the address of the Spirit (paradigmatically in baptism), a qualitative change is effected—sanctification—that will be completed, by degree, in the eschaton.

²⁹ Robert W Jenson, “Some Riffs on Thomas Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*,” in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honor of John Webster*, ed R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 130.

³⁰ Hart, “Notes on the Concept of the Infinite,” 258.

Before returning to baptism, one word of clarification is needed. I have intentionally refrained from using the phrase that God is “outside time,” not because its contrary “inside time” is more fitting but rather because both are infelicitous. More fitting, in line with my argument, is the traditional language of transcendence and immanence. God *transcends* creaturely time in the exact same sense in which God transcends finitude—as the infinite plenitude and source of creaturely being/time. God is immanent in the same sense, as the infinite act in which creatures participate. Because I have rejected the notion of time as a “container,” God can neither be excluded nor included “in time.” Rather, the dynamic of God’s creative life is the necessary condition of creaturely time. As its source, sustainer, and goal, God is intimately present to creatures in their temporality and is in no way aloof or contrary to it. The difference between time and eternity is not strictly negative but analogical, for creatures live as finite participants in God’s infinite self-donation.

Baptism, Redux: Concluding Reflections

How is it that in baptism the participant emerges from the water into a genuine foretaste of resurrection life? How is it that the effect of baptism is a participation in God beyond which we cannot “progress” prior to the End, per Jenson?

Baptism demonstrates the concrete enactment of the Spirit’s gift as promised by Christ. Emerging from the waters, then, is to be raised by the personal address of the One who raised Jesus from the dead. Though baptism and the final resurrection at the End are metrically distinct events—i.e., the interval between the two could to some extent be measured—they possess a shared enacted meaning, arising from their transcendent determination. It is as Person that the future encounters the Christian, both at their baptism and at their final resurrection.

The above discussion of eternity and time does not change or redirect the language used in the New Testament and baptismal practices,³¹ rather it makes it more intelligible. Baptism’s multiple temporal references—Christ’s baptism, his death and resurrection, the general resurrection of the dead, Spirit-enabled life in the Church—are meaningful and true because baptism is a Triune act in which God’s Eternality *encompasses* our temporality. Baptism “takes time,” both in the sense that it is a creaturely act that has a duration and in that its meaning is tied to multiple events across time. And in its time-fullness, baptism “partakes of the Eternal.” Through baptism, time itself is sanctified as the new time that God opens up for the Church to be a priestly community freed to live as improvisations of the life of Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5; Rev 1:5-6).

Time is not coerced or distorted in baptism, as if God must rearrange moments on an absolute line so the baptizand might receive a share in the resurrection life. Whatever the future life in the final Kingdom will be, it will be determined by creaturely partaking of the Triune Persons as the life God shares. So, this “final future” and the future received in baptism are acts of the one Spirit who is the Whither in God’s own life, now addressed also to us. And by the address of the Father, our being remains through the death and resurrection of baptism, and so we have

³¹ While the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene does not repeat all that the NT says on baptism, it includes a reading of Romans 6 where baptism is identified with Christ’s death and resurrection, a reading of the Apostles’ Creed, and baptism in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

sufficient continuity that transformation—rather than annihilation—is possible. And we are granted the present as a share in the life of Christ, a life of faithfulness within the community of Christ’s body.

Consequently, there is an important sense in which the Christian life is not characterized by “progress,” if by that we mean moving beyond what God effects in baptism. Life in the Church, as the life of those baptized into Christ with the Spirit, is the eschatological life beyond which is only the Kingdom. The freedom of Christians is not a freedom to move *beyond* their baptized identities, but to continually strive to perform the life granted *in* baptism by the address of the Spirit. So baptism is something to which the Christian continually strives to *catch up*, because it is a future life constituted by the personal address of the Spirit, the Whither of God. It *is* the future life beyond which is only the final fellowship in the triune life of God.

The resurrection-life of the Spirit in baptism is an anticipation of life in the new creation. But they are not absolutely distinct. Baptism is an anticipation insofar as it truly shares in what that new life will be: an offering of our created being in perfect response to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. So Martin Luther can interpret *theosis*: “The word of God became flesh, . . . that the flesh may become word.”³² The *telos* of creaturely existence is the offering of our life as an embodied word to God, and in both baptism and final resurrection the Spirit addresses us as the freedom to do just that.

³² Martin Luther, cited in Tuomo Mannermaa, “Why is Luther So Fascinating?: Modern Finnish Luther Research,” in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed Carl E Brazen and Robert W Jenson (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

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