Alexander Garton-Eisenacher

Divine Freedom and Revelation in Christ

The Doctrine of Eternity with Special Reference to the Theology of Karl Barth

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For My Father

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1.   Introduction

1.1   Scope

Among the basic tenets of the Christian faith, two appear to exist in an uneasy tension. It is fundamental to Christianity to claim that, in and through Christ, the believer knows God as he truly is. In this way, Christian theology is founded on the claim of possessing reliable knowledge of God through divine acts in time.[1] Yet, it is also crucial for Christianity that these same divine acts are undertaken freely rather than out of necessity. It is this notion of God's freedom *ad extra* that establishes the gracious nature of humanity's existence and fellowship with God, by precluding the interpretation that this state of affairs arises by virtue of external compulsion or simply as a side-effect of God's quest for self-actualization.

Here Christian theology finds itself on the horns of a dilemma: the more we emphasize the reliability and hence ontological significance of temporal christological revelation[2] (i. e., that it discloses God's true reality), the less we seem able to accept the possibility of hypothetical states of affairs in which God acts differently in time (so-called "counterfactuals"). Conversely, the more we defend God's freedom to have acted differently, the less we seem able to avoid the conclusion that there is a gap between what God reveals and God's true reality. Thus, on the one hand, in stressing the role of Christ, theology risks positing a God who is dependent on the world for his existence and whose supposedly gracious acts *ad extra* were actually undertaken for God's own benefit. On the other hand, in affirming the possibility of counterfactuals, theology risks concluding that even the most fundamental

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1 While the affirmation of Christ's divinity is fundamentally a matter of faith, it is essential to Christian theology to establish the internal coherence, presupposing this faith, of the claim that God is as he is disclosed in Christ. If our entire theological edifice is conversely built on the premise that this too is nothing more than a matter of faith, all theological arguments become at their most basic nothing more than faith-based assertions with inherently equal validity. By extension, though we might confess the Nicene Creed, we would be unable to articulate what this faith tells us, if anything, about God (and hence ourselves) beyond the sheer fact of the economy of salvation.

2 The term "christological revelation" is used in this book primarily to refer to knowledge about God mediated through the incarnation. Nevertheless, as we shall see in chapter two, it is a basic contention of Karl Barth's theology that all God's work *ad extra* is subsumed under his primal act of election whose content is Jesus Christ. As such, Barth sees God's relationship to creation *tout court*, including the entire content of revelation (whether disclosed through the incarnation or otherwise), as at base christological in nature. It follows that the question of whether God is truly as he is revealed in Christ is by extension the question of whether *any* knowledge about God can be said to be reliable.

doctrines of the Christian faith describe nothing more than a "mask" worn by an unknowable God.

The following book explores proposed solutions to this tension between epistemological reliability and divine counterfactual freedom (henceforth termed the "epistemology-freedom debate"), building particularly from the work of Karl Barth. The book begins with Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, before moving to the contemporary debate between the Princeton Barthian theologians Bruce McCormack and George Hunsinger regarding how Barth underpins his solution to the epistemology-freedom debate metaphysically. Next, the book explores a proposed corrective of Barth's thought in the narrative theology of Robert Jenson. These Barthian and post-Barthian models are finally contrasted with a new solution derived from classical metaphysics, focussing particularly on the works of Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

1.2   Purpose and methodology

The purpose of this book is to contribute to the epistemology-freedom debate, in the first instance by offering a fresh reading of the *Church Dogmatics* that marks a distinct break from the cul-de-sac in which recent Barth scholarship has found itself. Despite the prominence of McCormack's and Hunsinger's interpretations of Barth, neither is able convincingly to explain all of Barth's metaphysical statements beyond recourse to the suggestion of inconsistency. At root here is the fact that neither's proposed "Barthian" solution to the epistemology-freedom debate effectively balances Barth's genuine concerns over both epistemological reliability *and* divine freedom. By contrast, my own reading traces a consistent understanding of the divine ontology in the *Church Dogmatics* that holds together the twin facets of the debate, reclaiming Barth's theology as a promising starting point for a comprehensive solution.

Nonetheless, the book also shows that Barth's theology on this point is undermined by the doctrine of eternity within which it is framed. By identifying similarly fatal problems with Jenson's narratological "corrective" of Barth, also as a result of his understanding of God's relationship to time, the book demonstrates that the doctrine of eternity plays a much more decisive role in the epistemology-freedom debate than hitherto acknowledged. In the Barthian and post-Barthian solutions, the doctrine of eternity is employed merely *ex post facto* to build a metaphysic around a prefigured epistemological stance. As a result, the resources offered by this doctrine have been underplayed in the debate, and its formulations have suffered due to being moulded as ancillary arguments rather than made a direct focus of analysis. The book aims to show how approaching the debate through the explicit lens of the doctrine of eternity provides a more comprehensive account both of

God's relation to time and of how the reliability of christological revelation can be reconciled with divine counterfactual freedom.

I thus begin with the classical doctrine of eternity but seek to read this doctrine against a Barthian background. Specifically, I identify two key motifs employed by Barth to underpin his doctrine of election – the *analogia temporalis* and the identification of God as a being-in-act – which I propose should equally serve as foci when examining classical eternity. This book shows that both principles can indeed be authentically derived from the latter doctrine, and furthermore that these classical explications have major advantages over their Barthian equivalents. At the same time, in reading the classical doctrine of eternity against a Barthian background, we draw out a more temporal, dynamic interpretation of classical eternity than the characterization that has dominated contemporary scholarship. In this way, the book also shows that reading classical eternity against a Barthian background offers a way of both reframing and ultimately reclaiming it as a viable Christian understanding of God's relationship to time.

One of the core tensions exhibited by competing solutions to the epistemology-freedom debate concerns whether one understands divine decisions within an "intellectualist" or "voluntarist" framework. For the purpose of this book, I use these terms to refer to the theories originally codified in the later Middle Ages regarding whether the intellect or the will is assigned a predominant role in God's decisions. In the former (intellectualist) case, any choice of the will inherently results from what the intellect identifies as the greatest good; hence, every divine act is undertaken because and only insofar as it represents the greatest possible good as discerned by God's omniscient intellect. By contrast, the latter (voluntarist) reasoning emphasizes the divine will over the divine intellect and so stresses the indetermination of the will. As Tobias Hoffmann notes, however, these two terms most appropriately describe the extreme ends of the spectrum, with many writers showing tendencies towards both intellectualism and voluntarism, or considering the intellect and will to be so intertwined that the classifications become meaningless.[3]

It is the contention of this book that almost all of its key interlocutors fall into such an intermediary position, for which reason applying the terms "intellectualist" or "voluntarist" as hermeneutical keys in assessing their arguments would serve only to promulgate reductionistic accounts.[4] I thus consciously eschew these cate-

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3 Tobias Hoffmann, 'Intellectualism and Voluntarism', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* Volume 1, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 414.

4 For example, Hoffmann convincingly argues that Aquinas sees the will and intellect as thoroughly interpenetrated (Hoffmann, 'Intellectualism and Voluntarism', 415–416). Both Ian A. McFarland and Matthew J. Aragon Bruce have shown that, despite tendencies towards voluntarism, Barth's theology cannot be simply reduced to this position (Ian A. McFarland, 'Present in Love: Rethinking Barth on the Divine Perfections', *Modern Theology* 33, no. 2 (2017): 246; Matthew J. Aragon Bruce, 'Election',

gories, instead seeking to take each scholar on their own terms. In keeping with this sensitivity towards varied and often nuanced attitudes towards the will and intellect in divine decisions, a deliberate effort has been made to ensure that the themes at play in the following discussion are fundamental across the voluntarist-intellectualist spectrum, such that the overarching thesis developed in the course the book is applicable regardless of the position one takes in this debate.

For this reason, the use of counterfactual possibility as a metric for divine freedom in this book should not be taken to entail a modern conception of freedom as "liberty"; that is, having multiple options to choose from when making a decision. Insofar as "liberty" suggests that any of these alternative options could equally well have been actualized, the resultant conception of freedom is incompatible with a strict intellectualism in which the will is always bound to actualize the greatest perceived good between contrary potentials. Rather, following both Patristic and Barthian theology, the book argues for a definition of divine freedom in terms of *aseity*, for which the key criterion is whether God's actions *ad extra* are extrinsic to him. By extension, in focussing the discussion of divine freedom on counterfactual possibility, we are not asking whether God could have undertaken hypothetical alternative courses of action to his actual acts of creation and salvation. Rather, this line of questioning is concerned simply with whether the bare possibility exists for God to *refrain* from a given action *ad extra* while remaining essentially the same God known to us in Christ. In this way, the use of counterfactual possibility serves as a heuristic for ensuring that God's action *ad extra* is indeed gracious, by demonstrating that God can coherently be described (in principle, not in practice) without reference to creation.

1.3   Narrative outline

The next chapter begins by outlining Barth's attempt to secure the reliability of christological revelation not through historicizing the divine nature in creation (following Hegel), but rather through eternalizing the christological act, in the hope that this will better protect divine freedom. For Barth, therefore, revelation is reliable specifically because Christ's actions in time serve as a signpost both to God's eternal self-determination to be for-us (in his pretemporal decision to elect humanity to salvation), and to his eternal reality as Trinity through which everything God does in time merely repeats who and what God is in himself. In this way, Barth argues that God's eternal predestination is fully enacted and thus

in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, ed. Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul T. Nimmo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 318.

comprehensively disclosed on the cross as the election of the Son's humanity via the rejection of the Son's divinity. This importantly replaces the traditional Reformed *decretum absolutum*, a double-predestination made by an unknowable God on an unknowable basis, with a decision of salvation whose subject and object are none other than the Jesus Christ known to us in revelation.

It is clear that this principle, known as the *analogia temporalis*, is intimately bound up with both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of election. What is less clear is the relative ordering of these two doctrines in Barth's mature thought: is the subject of election the antecedently triune God who determines himself for incarnation *within this triune framework*, or is the self-determination of God actually a complete *self-constitution*, including the generation of his triunity as the means to facilitate election? In other words, does Barth posit the reliability of revelation by arguing that it ultimately points to God's primal reality as triune or to his primal act of election? Chapter three examines these two alternative interpretations of Barth, seen most archetypally in the works of McCormack and Hunsinger. For McCormack, Barth's mature thought is thoroughly actualist; yet while Barth thus identifies God's triunity as a logical function of election, he fails to carry this through consistently in the rest of his theology, repeatedly lapsing back into essentialist statements to secure divine freedom. By contrast, Hunsinger argues that Barth's concern not to tie God to creation convinces him to maintain a traditional ordering of election as logically subsequent to God's triunity, and thus fundamentally as an expression of the latter. He explains the presence of both actualist and essentialist statements in the *Church Dogmatics* by arguing that Barth rejects metaphysics as a controlling system in his theology, instead jumping from actualism to essentialism as he sees fit in the conviction that no one system can encapsulate God.

After showing that neither position is able to reflect the full range of ontological statements in the *Church Dogmatics*, I put forward my own interpretation of Barth's metaphysics in chapter four. While I agree with Hunsinger that Barth places God's triunity before election, I depart from both Hunsinger and McCormack by arguing that Barth does in fact have a consistent understanding of the divine ontology. This is summarized in Barth's description of God as a "being-in-act" which, rather than collapsing being into act (as McCormack claims), instead presents being and act in God as equiprimordial and mutually entailing. That is, God is neither an essence that subsequently engages in act nor an act that generates the divine essence, but a "divine reality" whose act of triune relationality both constitutes and expresses his essential being. In the act of election, God determines his being-in-act anew as this primordial triune relationality *plus* a new elector-elected relationality in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, while God gains a new mode of identification as a result of this decision (insofar as he becomes God-for-us), his *essential being* remains the same insofar as this new relationality is fundamentally a repetition *ad extra* of God's

primordial intratrinitarian relationality *ad intra*. In this way, Barth is able to assert both God's counterfactual freedom in the act of election (that is, that God would be essentially the same had he not engaged in election) *and* that the act of election has ontological significance for God such that he cannot now be considered devoid of it.

In chapters five and six, I show how Barth underpins his solution to the epistemology-freedom debate through his doctrine of eternity. Here Barth argues via the *analogia temporalis* that since Christ's relationship to time must provide reliable knowledge of God's eternity *in se*, the divine life must likewise be structured by the distinctions of past, present and future, and hence chronological succession. However, since this successive structure threatens to relegate election exclusively to the pretemporal past, isolated from its realization in the incarnation, Barth develops the idea of God's being-in-act as continually reaffirmed at every moment. This means that God reiteratively wills, and thereby maintains, both his triune relationship *ad intra* and his elector-elected relationship *ad extra* in the present. In this way, Barth is able to affirm both that God will never contradict his determination to be for-us in election (thus redefining divine immutability as God's faithfulness to this decision) *and* that he always retains his freedom regarding subsequent manifestations of this relationship.

Nevertheless, as chapter seven argues, this division between election and the incarnation fatally undermines Barth's argument. Most notably, it refutes Barth's claim that *election* determines the divine being-in-act anew by integrating into it a new elector-elected relationality in the person of Jesus Christ. This is because the person of Jesus Christ and hence the human nature in which humanity is elected only comes into being with the *incarnation*. However, if it is not Christ but rather creation generically considered which comes into being as a direct result of election, and which thus stands as election's object, this decision is detached from christological revelation, undermining Barth's reformulation of Calvinist double-predestination and returning us to the *decretum absolutum*. Barth's attempt to bridge this division by stating that God reaffirms his triunity and election at every moment results in a tension in Barth's theology between either (1) claiming that God *cannot* withdraw from his relationship with humanity, tying him to creation; or (2) claiming this relationship is always subject to the danger of being rescinded and, by the same token, that God's triunity is also liable to being dissolved. Further, as Robert Jenson notes, the separation of primordial election from the act of the incarnation results in the *analogia temporalis* becoming in essence the attempt to transcend revelation in favour of a qualitatively different, albeit analogically related, reality behind it. By extension, Barth's strong theological focus backwards to pretemporal eternity as the true nexus of God's relationship with creation inevitably correlates to an equal focus on the primordial reality of the Logos behind the flesh of Christ, resulting in a *Deus absconditus*.

It follows that while Barth's argument serves as a promising starting point for a comprehensive solution to the epistemology-freedom debate, it requires a significant corrective. The book turns in chapter eight to the post-Barthian theology of Robert Jenson to seek this corrective, on the basis that his theology builds on Barth's but significantly departs from it over the aforementioned concerns regarding the separation between election and revelation caused by Barth's *analogia temporalis*. Jenson identifies the key problem with Barth's use of the doctrine of election to be his analogically mediated epistemology. He attempts to resolve this problem by locating election within the event of revelation itself as God's decision to resurrect Jesus. Redefining metaphysics along narratological lines, Jenson argues that God is not merely to be identified *by* the biblical narrative but moreover *with* the biblical narrative itself. He maintains divine freedom within this system by redefining it as God's "futurity" and hence as a function of the doctrine of eternity, asserting that God cannot be conditioned by anything outside of himself because he is always "ahead" of anything within creation that might threaten to circumscribe him. Our critical evaluation of Jenson's argument ultimately concludes, however, that his identification of God with the biblical narrative results in a form of idolatry. Jenson's attempt to deny this by redefining freedom in terms of futurity is unsuccessful because futurity is simply unable to serve the same purpose as counterfactual freedom; namely, to secure the gracious nature of divine acts *ad extra*. Finally, because the shape of Jenson's doctrine of eternity is dictated by these concerns, it is unable to conform to key aspects of the scriptural account of Jesus' pre-existence.

Our examination of Jenson demonstrates, first, that the problem with Barth's solution is not his use of the *analogia temporalis* per se, since rejecting it serves only to create serious problems for divine freedom, resulting in the re-emergence of this analogy to compensate. The implication is that our corrective of Barth is instead to be found in a more robust and therefore comprehensive use of the *analogia temporalis*. Second, our analysis of where Jenson's solution breaks down reveals that for him, as for Barth, a key source of problems is the doctrine of eternity. Both theologians employ this doctrine only in an ancillary capacity, dictated by presupposed epistemological concerns, resulting in a truncated version of the doctrine unable to withstand metaphysical or exegetical scrutiny. On this basis, the book concludes that the doctrine of eternity in fact plays an essential role in the epistemology-freedom debate that has hitherto remained unrecognized. Accordingly, the book proposes that the debate instead be approached from the explicit standpoint of the doctrine of eternity, allowing us to fully utilize the latter's recourses. The classical interpretation of eternity is identified as the logical framework from which to proceed in this regard, both because it offers a highly developed metaphysical grounding, and because Barth builds his own doctrine of eternity around the Boethian definition that is the archetype for the classical model.

Chapter nine thus commences with an outline of the classical doctrine of eternity, noting its basic principle of simultaneity in the articulations of Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas. The chapter goes on to examine the origins of classical eternity in divine immutability, simplicity and, ultimately, the identification of God as *actus purus*. An extended engagement with this latter concept reveals that scholarship on the terms *potentia* and *actus*, despite their foundational importance in classical Christian metaphysics, has been underdeveloped, resulting in the terms being misconstrued. In response, I show that the term *actus* is indissoluble with "activity", since the original Greek word ἐνέργεια to which it refers was designed with the explicit remit of combining the concepts of being and act. This results in the conclusion that God, as *actus purus*, is inherently active, with the act inherent to God being subsequently identified as his triune relationality. In this way, the principle of *actus purus* results in a divine ontology very similar to Barth's identification of God as a being-in-act.

Unlike the Barthian equivalent, however, use of the classical *actus purus* results in a conception of God's acts, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*, as eternally operative, on the basis that God has no latent capacities and thus no beginning or end to his acts. I follow Brian Leftow in identifying eternity as a dimension outside of four-dimensional space-time for which all temporal beings and events have co-ordinates and on the basis of which God can produce temporal effects. The upshot of these conclusions is an eternal conception of the incarnation, and hence the unreserved identity of the Logos with the person of Jesus Christ. By our identification of being and act as indissoluble in God, we are, moreover, able to deny a higher "essence" behind God's act of incarnation and, by extension, a reality of the Logos that is not *ensarkos*. Instead, since God is his act of incarnation, the content of christological revelation is none other than the divine reality itself. Finally, since classical eternity denies the before-after structure in God that subsequence presupposes, we are able to side-step the question of whether God is able to rescind his election or triunity as a category error.

In chapter ten, I return to the concept of eternity as "unity", showing how it results in an understanding of time as distended eternity. In this way, the book turns the ubiquitous characterization of classical eternity as "absolute timelessness" on its head, instead showing that it envisions eternity as the archetype and source of all time. Based on this conclusion, I show that eternity possesses the truest forms of duration and movement from which all temporal duration and movement derive. Developing from our conclusions in chapter nine, I identify this movement of eternity as the triune perichoresis, with time's procession from and return to eternity as a reflection of this circular movement of the divine persons. Yet, if this latter temporal efflux and reflux is understood primarily as the economy of salvation – creation from God for the purpose of reconciliation in Christ – it follows that the divine circular movement has *itself* a created analogue, namely the divine

missions. In this way, the classical doctrine of eternity produces its own concept of the *analogia temporalis*.

Unlike the Barthian version, however, the eternal reality of the divine missions (from the divine perspective) proposed by classical eternity allows us to identify them as the temporal dimension of the divine processions themselves, rather than as a distinct temporal occurrence that merely reflects the latter. Von Balthasar develops this point, arguing that the kenosis, suffering, Godforsakenness and death found on the cross are, properly understood, none other than temporal manifestations of the eternal self-giving by which the triune persons are generated. This importantly overcomes Jenson's critique that the *analogia temporalis* constitutes the attempt to transcend revelation, since it means that an exploration of God's immanent reality is simply the attempt to understand the event of revelation itself more fully.

Nevertheless, the book does not just conclude that the classical doctrine of eternity provides a corrective to Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate. Rather, it also makes the equally strong assertion that reading this doctrine against a Barthian background allows us to rediscover significant aspects of the classical doctrine of eternity that have been underdeveloped in contemporary scholarship, such as *actus purus* and *analogia temporalis*. The picture of classical eternity we end up with thus represents a significant departure from its contemporary characterization as "timelessness", demonstrating that its chief exponents in fact understood eternity as supremely temporal, durative, dynamic and vivacious. By showing that these rediscovered features help refute three dominant critiques of classical eternity, the book ends by asserting that the classical doctrine may be reclaimed as an authentic expression of the Christian faith.

Part I: Reckoning with Karl Barth

2.   Barth's Analogically Mediated Epistemology

2.1   The analogical truth of revelation

Considered in itself, christological revelation might be thought to reveal nothing more than God's relationship to creation, disclosing God's salvific action in the economy in such a way that this relationship appears describable under terms such as "gracious", "loving", "merciful" and "righteous". Nonetheless, as Karl Barth recognizes, it is a theological imperative that revelation has the ability to describe not only God's relationship to creation but also the divine reality *in se*. Any possibility that God would have been (or is) different apart from creation is intolerable to Christian theology, since it means nothing revealed in Christ can be accepted as definitive of God. Without assurance, therefore, that what is disclosed in the divine economy corresponds to God's true nature, faith is condemned to the suspicion that God has "revealed" himself in a way 'completely different' from his immanent reality.[1]

Barth attempts to provide such assurance by appeal to what we may term an *analogia temporalis*, arguing that christological revelation has unreserved reliability because it acts as a temporal signpost to God's eternal triune reality *in se*.[2] This argument is predicated on the assertion that God is completely himself in his act of revelation, such that revelation can be described as a repetition of God, 'completely identical with God himself'.[3]

The use of this analogy takes multiple forms throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, of which I shall cite three prominent examples. First, in terms of fellowship, Barth argues that God did not need to seek out and create fellowship between himself and humanity in time because he already has fellowship in eternity by virtue of his triunity. Accordingly, when God creates human beings in order to have fellowship with them, this fellowship constitutes merely a temporal reduplication of the fellowship existent in the intratrinitarian life.[4] As such, Barth argues that God's choice to elect humanity is fundamentally the choice to continue for an other *ad extra* the love he already has for an other *ad intra*. This means that, in God's love

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1   Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 364–365. [‚Ganz Anderer'.]

2   Barth, *KD* II/1, 59–60.

3   Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 313–315. [‚Restlos mit Gott selber identisch ist'.]

4   Mark James Edwards, *The Divine Moment: Eternity, Time, and Triune Temporality in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 83.

for humanity exhibited in revelation, we see 'the true nature and essence of God's love for "others" *ad intra*'.[5]

Second, in terms of the dynamic of otherness and obedience, Barth argues that the antithesis between God and his creation reduplicates what exists within the intratrinitarian life. Specifically, Barth argues that the relationship between God and Jesus exhibited in the divine work of reconciliation is a temporal analogue of the eternal relationship between the Father, commanding in majesty, and the Son, obeying in humility. This means, by extension, that the Son's humility in the incarnation is done in correspondence to, and thus 'as the wonderfully consistent final sequel to', his eternal intratrinitarian history.[6] Thus, in the act of the atonement, God 'not only depicts his inner being as God as he did in creation…but lets it become external as such', "activating" and so revealing himself *ad extra*.[7]

Third, in terms of the very fact of the economy of salvation, Barth argues that the covenant of grace that we experience in time is a demonstration and confirmation of God's eternal intratrinitarian relationality. He explains that this grace is 'properly and essentially divine', since the prototypical archetype of this form of relationality is 'the Holy Spirit's union across the "antithesis" of Father and Son'.[8] It follows that the grace we experience in the economy of salvation is not the result of caprice, but is rather 'the very essence of the being of God'.[9] In this way, Barth establishes an 'absolute continuity' between God's eternal grace *ad intra* and his temporal grace *ad extra*, secured by his language of "repetition" and "recapitulation".[10]

Yet, Barth argues further that the eternal divine being is not merely signposted in historical revelation, but also acts as the very ground of the possibility of revelation itself, since the content of revelation 'refers us back to a corresponding inner possibility in God himself'.[11] Consequently, the content of revelation is in the first instance and decisively God's readiness to be known: that God is so constituted that he can reveal himself.[12] This is what Barth means when he says that the content of revelation is always and at all times that God reveals himself as the Lord. In the Bible, God's lordship is his true freedom, and the incarnation is a decision taken in this freedom. Hence, to say that God reveals himself as the Lord means the content

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5 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 83; Barth, *KD* II/1, 306–307.

6 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 222–223. [‚In wunderbar konsequenter letzter Fortsetzung'.]

7 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 223. [‚Daß er dieses sein inneres Sein als Gott nun nicht nur wie in der Schöpfung abbildet…sondern als solches äußerlich werden läßt'.]

8 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 98–99. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* II/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 356.

9 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 99. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 356.

10 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 99–100.

11 Barth, *KD* I/1, 412–413. [‚Zurück auf eine entsprechende innere Möglichkeit in Gott selber'.]

12 Barth, *KD* II/1, 70–71.

of revelation is that God is free to reveal himself. It is for this reason that Barth can say that God's revelation of his lordship is nothing other than the revelation of himself.[13]

Since God 'by nature cannot be unveiled to humans', however, the fact that he nevertheless does unveil himself in revelation means that in this self-unveiling (and this is the definition of the self-unveiling) God takes on a new mode of being in which he *can* be unveiled.[14] Barth explains that in revelation God becomes 'his own *Doppelgänger*', constituting 'a self-differentiation of God from himself'.[15] With this in mind, the lordship of God that forms the content of revelation is specifically that God is free 'to differentiate himself from himself' and so to reveal himself in another mode.[16] However, since God does not become these distinct modes simply in revelation, revelation teaches us, further, that God is differentiated in himself; hence the revelation of God's ability to be differentiated is ultimately the revelation of his triunity.

That God's triunity is both revealed in and forms the logically antecedent basis for revelation is made clear in Barth's excursus on God's knowability in *Church Dogmatics* II/1. Here, Barth argues that it is because God is eternally knowable to himself that he is able to be knowable to us; however, he explains that God 'is first and foremost knowable to himself *as the triune God*' (emphasis added).[17] Accordingly, God is able to stand objectively before us because he first has objectivity in himself. It should be noted that Barth's concept of 'objectivity' here presents a continuity and correspondence between God *ad intra* and *ad extra*, while nevertheless ensuring the logical priority of the former in order to preclude the notion that God only becomes triune by establishing a relation with creation.[18]

2.2   The compatibility of the incarnation with the divinity of Christ

Barth secures the reliability of christological revelation in no way more emphatically than in his assertion that this event is not actually alien to God at all but is in fact '*most proper to him*' since revelation repeats and represents what God is in himself.[19]

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13 Barth, *KD* I/1, 323–324.

14 Barth, *KD* I/1, 332–333. [‚Des seinem Wesen nach dem Menschen unenthüllbaren Gottes‘.]

15 Barth, *KD* I/1, 333–334. [‚Sein eigener Doppelgänger‘.] [‚Ein sich Unterscheiden Gottes von sich selbst‘.]

16 Barth, *KD* I/1, 337–338. [‚Sich von selbst sich zu unterscheiden‘.]

17 Barth, *KD* II/1, 73. [‚Daß er als der dreieinige Gott zuerst und vor Allem sich selbst erkennbar ist‘.]

18 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 81.

19 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 381. [‚*sein eigenstes*‘.]

He argues that, in the history between God and humanity, nothing that takes place is only indirectly or improperly divine; rather, God is faithful to us while at the same time being primarily faithful to himself.[20] As such, the relationship between God and the world revealed to us in Christ in no way gives a contradictory expression of God's being but is rather '*the* natural confirmation of God's being *ad extra*'.[21] Underlying this is the conviction that God does not change when he is united with humanity in Christ. Instead, this event is 'entirely God himself', confirming and revealing God 'as the one who he is', namely 'the creator and reconciler of his creature'.[22] Once again, this argument presupposes the antecedent triunity of God: it is possible for God to become incarnate without changing 'because the incarnation is as such the confirmation of the triunity of God'.[23] That is, the incarnation reveals the distinction between the Father and the Son as well as their fellowship in the Holy Spirit.[24]

Accordingly, Barth argues that the language of 'self-emptying' in Philippians 2:5–8 does not mean that Christ surrendered or even curtailed his divinity in the incarnation; rather, it refers to the Son not considering equality with God and distinction from the creature as 'his sole exclusive possibility'.[25] This facilitates a positive conception of the self-emptying as the Son's ability to assume the form of a servant 'irrespective of his divine form'.[26] However, if this self-emptying has nothing to do with surrender or loss of deity, then it must belong to the divine essence to be capable of this act.[27]

When we make this progression from merely saying that revelation's truth is grounded in the divine being to arguing that God does not undergo any change in the incarnation because this event is in fact *supremely true to the divine being*, profound conclusions ensue. Barth notes that if we do not play down Christ's humility as 'a behaviour of the human Jesus of Nazareth', but understand it to represent 'a humility grounded in the being of God', then, since Jesus' humility is specifically an act of obedience, we may conclude that even obedience cannot be alien to God, and therefore that '[God] himself is also able and free to render

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20 Barth, *KD* IV/2, 386–388.

21 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357. [‚*die* natürliche Betätigung des Wesens Gottes nach außen'.]

22 Barth, *KD* II/1, 579. [‚Als ganz er selbst…als der, der er ist und als der Schöpfer und als der Versöhner seiner Kreatur'.]

23 Barth, *KD* II/1, 579. [‚Weil die Menschwerdung als solche die Bestätigung der Dreieinigkeit Gottes ist'.]

24 Barth, *KD* II/1, 579.

25 Barth, *KD* II/1, 580. [‚Sein einzige, ausschließliche Möglichkeit'.]

26 Barth, *KD* II/1, 580. [‚Unbeschadet seiner Gottesgestalt!']

27 Barth, *KD* II/1, 580–581.

obedience.[28] However, since obedience implies the dynamic of 'a superiority and a subordination', it further follows that this dynamic is at play within the triune life.[29]

Standing behind these conclusions is the conviction that the flesh taken on in the incarnation does not "overtake" the divine nature and hence that 'God remains God even in his humiliation'.[30] For Barth, this assertion is indispensable since any weakening of Christ's deity 'would immediately call into question the atonement that has taken place in him'.[31] As Barth puts it, 'Of what help would his deity be to us if – instead of crossing in that deity the very real abyss between us and him – he left it behind him in his turning to us'?[32]

2.3 Revelation and election: Christ as the disclosure of ontological self-determination

In order to flesh out Barth's understanding of revelation, it is necessary to refer to his doctrine of election, since Barth views election as 'the divine decision which precedes, characterizes and gives rise to all God's work *ad extra*'.[33] He argues that revelation discloses knowledge of this eternal decision and self-determination of God, and that this is why there is no deeper reality of God than that revealed christologically. As such, Barth asserts that to know who God is and the meaning and purpose of his election, we must look no further than Jesus Christ, 'and the existence and history of the people of God enclosed within him'.[34]

Since, as aforementioned, Barth rejects the possibility that God could declare himself to us as Christ (and thus as God-for-us) while 'having another being in and by himself', he understands God's self-determination in election to be ontological in nature.[35] Thus, while Barth grants that Christ is God specifically in his movement towards humanity, he argues that because this movement is grounded in election, it

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28 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 211. [‚Ein Verhalten des Menschen Jesus von Nazareth… eine im Wesen Gottes begründete Demut… daß er selbst auch dessen fähig, auch dazu frei ist, *Gehorsam* zu leisten'.]

29 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 213. [‚Einen Vor- und einen Nach- und Untergeordneten'.]

30 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 196. [‚Gott bleibt Gott auch in seiner Erniedrigung'.]

31 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 196. [‚Würde hier ja sofort eine Problematisierung der in ihm geschehenen Versöhnung bedeuten'.]

32 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 202. [‚Was hülfe uns seine Gottheit, wenn er sie – statt eben *in* seiner Gottheit den realen Abgrund zwischen uns und ihm zu überschreiten – in der Zuwendung zu uns gewissermaßen hinter sich ließe'?]

33 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 55. [‚Der göttlichen Entscheidung, die allem Wirken Gottes nach außen vorangeht, die es charakterisiert und von der es herkommt'.]

34 Barth, *KD* II/2, 57–58. [‚Und die in ihm beschlossene Existenz und Geschichte des Volkes Gottes'.]

35 Barth, *KD* II/2, 2. [‚Daß er an sich und in sich wohl auch noch ein anderes Wesen hätte'.]

'is an irrevocably undertaken behaviour, such that after God has willed to undertake it…he would no longer be God without it'.[36] In this behaviour, God has determined himself 'so that this determination now belongs to him just as much as all that he is in and for himself'.[37] This means that God's innermost being, willing and nature 'is not without relationship, but rather stands in a definite relationship *ad extra* to another'.[38]

Barth explains that while the human nature of Jesus and the elect are distinct from God, they are 'so assigned' to the divine reality that God cannot be considered apart from them.[39] Through a decision of free love, 'God wills to be and is God' only in his attitude and relation to humanity.[40] Accordingly, God's determination is not something he has taken upon himself as something additional that is only valid with respect to his relationship to the world, but is 'proper to his own eternal being', since he has 'so certainly…decided for [it] by the decree of his eternal will'.[41] The consequence of this is that 'no decisions can be expected from God apart from decisions which are based on this concrete determination and commitment of his being'.[42]

To understand what "decisions" Barth is referring to here, we must first recognize that he does not consider predestination to take place solely in pre-temporal eternity as a completed event, since this would make God's action in the present nothing more than the mechanical fulfilment of his prior decree. Barth rejects this on the grounds that the object of our faith 'cannot be a God who once elected and determined but here and now is no longer this one who elects and determines'.[43] While Barth agrees that election, as something that has happened from all eternity, is complete, he argues that precisely for this reason it cannot simply be behind us, but must rather take place inexhaustibly at every present moment.[44] However,

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36 Barth, *KD* II/2, 6. [‚Ein unwiderruflich eingenommenes Verhalten Gottes: ein solches, ohne das er, nachdem er es einnehmen wollte…nicht mehr Gott wäre'.]

37 Barth, *KD* II/2, 6. [‚So daß diese Bestimmtheit nun ebenso zu ihm gehört wie Alles, was er an und für sich selber ist'.]

38 Barth, *KD* II/2, 4. [‚Nicht ohne Beziehung ist, sondern in einer bestimmten Beziehung nach außen, zu einem Anderen steht'.]

39 Barth, *KD* II/2, 7. [‚So zugeordnet'.]

40 Barth, *KD* II/2, 7. [‚Gott sein will und Gott ist'.]

41 Barth, *KD* II/2, 53. [‚Weil sie die seinem eigenen ewigen Wesen eigentümliche Bestimmtheit und Bindung ist, so gewiß er sich im Beschluß seines ewigen Willens für sie entschieden hat'.]

42 Barth, *KD* II/2, 53. [‚So also, daß nicht irgendwelche Entscheidungen von ihm zu erwarten sind, sondern auf alle Fälle lauter solche Entscheidungen, welche auf dieser konkreten Bestimmung und Bindung seines Wesens…beruhen'.]

43 Barth, *KD* II/2, 200. [‚Der Gott nicht sein kann, der einmal erwählt und bestimmt hat, jetzt und hier aber gerade dieser Erwählende und Bestimmende nicht mehr ist'.]

44 Barth, *KD* II/2, 200–201.

if this act is living and continues to happen, then unless it is identified with the election of Jesus Christ, it will inevitably be thought of as the relationship of 'a player to a plaything', always at risk of changing form at God's whim.[45] By contrast, if predestination is identified with the election of Jesus Christ, then the divine will is truly determined and thus self-limited even while retaining its sovereignty, meaning that this sovereignty bears no resemblance to whim or caprice.[46]

In this way, to demonstrate the reliability of christological revelation, Barth replaces the classical notion of divine immutability with the concept of God's '*constancy*', by which he means that 'God *remains* the one he is'.[47] He argues that this is not in conflict with God's freedom and love; rather, his freedom and love are divine precisely 'because they are the freedom and the love of the one who is constant in himself'.[48] Thus, while God's life is the origin of all created change and 'the abundance of otherness, movement, will, decision, action, aging and rebirth', he is all this 'in eternal repetition and confirmation of himself'.[49] We may thus have confidence that God's life will never exhibit an alien form or operation, since these forms and operations are always fundamentally consistent with the way he has been revealed in Christ.[50]

For Barth, the fact that God is "the Lord of creation" means that he partakes in the change that creation goes through moment by moment, and hence that 'something corresponding to [that] change belongs to his own essence'; however, he argues that divine constancy means that God is nevertheless 'the same in every change'.[51] Accordingly, what is ruled out is not mutability *per se*, but specifically the human form of mutability as fickleness. Barth explains that while God 'is consistently one and the same', this should not be understood to mean that he is 'absolutely bound to be, to say and to do only one and the same thing'.[52] He is immutable but, as the living God, he also possesses a mobility and elasticity that is just as essential to his being.[53] This ensures that, while God can be known reliably, he is not thereby prevented from being genuinely alive, which Barth understands to mean having

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45 Barth, *KD* II/2, 211.

46 Barth, *KD* II/2, 211–212.

47 Barth, *KD* II/1, 552. [‚*Beständigkeit*'.] [‚Gott *bleibt* der er ist'.]

48 Barth, *KD* II/1, 552. [‚Weil sie die Freiheit und die Liebe dessen sind, der in sich beständig ist'.]

49 Barth, *KD* II/1, 553. [‚Die Fülle des Andersseins, der Bewegung, des Wollens, Beschließens und Tuns, des Alt- und Neuwerdens ist – lebt er es in ewiger Wiederholung und Bestätigung seiner selbst'.]

50 Barth, *KD* II/1, 553, 556.

51 Barth, *KD* II/1, 557. [‚Daß etwas ihrem Wechsel Entsprechendes auch seinem eigenen Wesen angehörte. Daß er in allem Wechsel derselbe ist und bleibt, das ist seine Beständigkeit'.]

52 Barth, *KD* II/1, 558. [‚Er ist konsequent Einer und Derselbe'.] [‚Sodaß er als Einer und Derselbe gebunden wäre, durchaus nur Eines und Dasselbe zu sein, zu sagen und zu tun'.]

53 Barth, *KD* II/1, 558.

different attitudes and actions in concurrence or sequence.[54] Likewise, it does not entail 'the loss of God's dynamic freedom to love, forgive and redeem because he is always free to manifest himself in a new triune moment'.[55]

2.4   The reliability of election: the reformulation of supralapsarianism

As Barth's conception of divine 'constancy' makes clear, God's will to become human (and thus his identity as Jesus Christ) is not merely an episode in the divine life, or an identity that God takes on solely to combat the interruption of his original will and purify his relationship with humanity. While the atonement is indeed God's act of wrestling with and overcoming human sin, it is nonetheless primarily an act of God's faithfulness to himself, as 'the execution of the plan and purpose which he had from the very first as the Creator'.[56] As such, Jesus is 'the concrete reality and efficacy of the divine commandment and the divine promise', and thus the content of the divine will which stands as the basis of creation and providence.[57]

This is because God's response to human sinfulness is simply to maintain his relationship to the world and 'bind himself afresh [to it] all the more',[58] meaning that the whole of the divine work *ad extra* is, in fact, 'a sole act of divine governance', which, while 'differentiated and flexible in itself', is nonetheless unbroken and irresistible.[59] In this way, Barth's understanding of the incarnation is "supralapsarian", which is to say that it places God's election of Jesus prior to (*supra*) humanity's creation and fall (*lapsus*). Barth asserts this supralapsarian position because the alternate ("infralapsarian") ordering, in which election is logically subsequent to creation and sin, makes creation independent of the economy of salvation, and so self-sufficient. Infralapsarianism thus implies that the universe and humanity could theoretically have been created and sustained without the need for the divine works of reconciliation and redemption. Sin thus becomes 'an unforeseen incident through which the good creation of God is suddenly rendered problematic', and rec-

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54 Barth, *KD* II/1, 560.

55 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 122–123.

56 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 50. [‚Ausführung des Vorsatzes und Planes, der bei ihm als dem Schöpfer aller Dinge und Herrn des ganzen Weltgeschehens von Anfang an feststand'.]

57 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 50. [‚Die konkrete Realität und Wirksamkeit des göttlichen Gebotes und der göttlichen Verheißung'.]

58 Barth, *KD* II/1, 567. [‚Indem er sich der sündigen Welt aufs Neue und erst recht so verbindet'.]

59 Barth, *KD* II/2, 97. [‚Einen einzigen, in sich freilich sehr differenzierten und bewegten…göttlichen Regierungsakt'.]

onciliation becomes an escape from the dilemma, as though God is here wrestling with a rival power, and thus 'a rival God'.[60]

The classical Reformed debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism is of particular significance to Barth's defence of the reliability of revelation. For Barth, the supralapsarian position has the advantage of being able to point to God's eternal decree of predestination to explain why God created humanity and allowed it to fall. Most importantly, it means that God's original will may be identified completely with the will revealed in the economy of salvation.[61] By contrast, infralapsarianism does not allow any exact knowledge either of the content of this primal plan or of the reason why God created humanity or allowed the fall to take place.[62] Barth thus considers the supralapsarian construction to be the superior of the two classical models, since it puts predestination (and hence the free grace of God) 'so consistently, so absolutely at the forefront of all Christian knowledge' that it sheds a clear light on all divine work and so on the divine being.[63]

Nevertheless, Barth notes that classical supra- and infralapsarianism share certain key presuppositions that render both models inadequate when taken in themselves. Both assert that God's predestination takes the form of a 'yes' and a 'no', a pronouncement of salvation to some and damnation to others, with the same emphasis and 'in complete *equilibrium* in every respect'.[64] Both hold that the divine good-pleasure which decided between election and rejection must be understood wholly as a *decretum absolutum* – 'as simply an act of divine freedom whose basis and meaning are absolutely hidden from us'.[65] Thus, both depict an abstract God rather than the God revealed in Jesus Christ.[66]

Barth therefore seeks to detach supralapsarianism from these presuppositions, beginning with the understanding of predestination as parallel messages of salvation and damnation. He calls for the decision of predestination to be reformulated as the decision of election, and thus as a proclamation purely of salvation. While this divine "yes" does necessarily imply a divine "no" as its perimeter,[67] Barth argues that this word of reprobation is spoken solely against God himself in God's decision to bear humanity's punishment for sinfulness on our behalf. This precludes any latent

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60 Barth, *KD* II/2, 96–97. [,Eines unvorhergesehenen Zwischenfalles, durch den die gute Schöpfung Gottes nun auf einmal problematisiert'.] [,Gegengott'.]

61 Barth, *KD* II/2, 136–139.

62 Barth, *KD* II/2, 139.

63 Barth, *KD* II/2, 145–146. [,So folgerichtig, so unbedingt an die Spitze aller christlichen Erkenntnis'.]

64 Barth, *KD* II/2, 144. [,In jeder Hinsicht in völligem *Gleichgewicht*'.]

65 Barth, *KD* II/2, 144. [,Als göttlicher Freiheitsakt schlechthin..., dessen Grund und Sinn uns schlechterdings verborgen'.]

66 Barth, *KD* II/2, 144.

67 Barth, *KD* II/2, 12.

speculation that predestination might mean humanity's rejection: at the deepest level of the divine will, predestination is the non-rejection of humanity because it is the rejection of the Son of God instead.[68]

Next, Barth turns to the idea that predestination has been undertaken in divine freedom with a completely unknowable basis. He notes that, if the ultimate feature of God is considered to be his absolute freedom, then the emphasis in predestination becomes the assertion that it is an absolutely free choice – a move that renders it indistinguishable from caprice.[69] Barth argues that our starting point should instead be that the decision of election was 'aimed at the sending of the Son of God' and is thus fulfilled in Christ.[70] It follows that it must always be seen as the '*opus internum ad extra* of the trinitarian God' (that is, the God who is loving *in se*).[71] Accordingly, while its freedom is indeed absolute, it is 'not an abstract freedom as such, but the freedom of the one who loves in freedom'.[72] If the subject of election is the one who loves in freedom, therefore, the outcome of this decision is always that God is for-us.[73]

If we employ the supralapsarian framework to understand christological revelation as the revelation of God's eternal will and good-pleasure, and if we acknowledge that this revelation is enacted in divine freedom rather than caprice, then we posit that, at the beginning of all things, God decreed that in the person of the eternal Son he should give himself to humanity by becoming the human Jesus Christ. We may thus say that 'Jesus Christ is the will of God, and we come to know this will in the revelation of Jesus Christ'.[74] In short, by identifying the content of the decree of election with Jesus Christ, we are able to affirm that it is not an unknowable *decretum absolutum* but rather the very knowledge disclosed in christological revelation.[75]

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68 Barth, *KD* II/2, 178–183.

69 Barth, *KD* II/2, 25.

70 Barth, *KD* II/2, 25–26. [‚Auf die Sendung des Sohnes Gottes zielende göttliche Willensentscheidung‘.]

71 Barth, *KD* II/2, 26. [‚Opus internum ad extra des trinitarischen Gottes‘.]

72 Barth, *KD* II/2, 26. [‚Nicht eine abstrakte Freiheit als solche, sondern die Freiheit dessen, welcher der in Freiheit *Liebende* ist‘.]

73 Barth, *KD* II/2, 26.

74 Barth, *KD* II/2, 171. [‚Indem Jesus Christus der Wille Gottes ist, den wir in seiner Offenbarung erkennen‘.]

75 Barth, *KD* II/2, 171–172.

2.5   The reliability of election: Jesus Christ as its subject and object

As aforementioned, if election is detached from the person of Jesus Christ, it becomes not only a higher decree behind and above the covenant revealed in him, but also in its very essence something qualitatively different from him. It becomes a hidden decree to which we can never entrust ourselves.[76] As such, it is imperative that 'we are certain *that in Jesus Christ we have to do immediately and directly with the electing God*', otherwise the doubt always remains that election concerns 'the will of a God who has not bound himself in covenant with us and who is *not* gracious towards us'.[77] However, Barth argues that this can only be achieved if Jesus Christ is himself identified as the electing God, rather than merely 'an elected means through which the electing God – electing elsewhere and otherwise – carries out what he has decreed'.[78] He thus concludes that Jesus Christ must be both the elected human and the electing God, allowing us to characterize the doctrine of predestination without reservation as none other than 'the *election of Jesus Christ*'.[79]

This thesis that predestination, and thus the eternal will of God, is fundamentally the election of Jesus Christ avoids the twofold problem found in all previous interpretations of the doctrine (viz., classic infra- and supralapsarianism): that both the subject and object of predestination – the electing God and the elected human – are unknown. While Barth accepts that an element of mystery inevitably remains, he identifies this as the majesty of a God who is fundamentally known rather than the majesty of a God who is fundamentally unknown, as in previous interpretations. This essential distinction stems from the fact that on both side of this mystery we have to do solely with Jesus Christ, meaning that God's eternal plan and decree at the beginning of all things is identical with what has been disclosed to us in christological revelation.[80]

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76 Barth, *KD* II/2, 115.

77 Barth, *KD* II/2, 115. [‚Wenn es uns also gewiß ist, *dass wir es in Jesus Christus unmittelbar mit dem erwählenden Gott selbst zu tun haben*… Mit dem Willen eines solchen Gottes zu tun haben, der sich uns nicht verbunden und verpflichtet hat, der uns *nicht* gnädig ist‘.]

78 Barth, *KD* II/2, 119. [‚Ein erwähltes Mittel, durch das der erwählende – der anderswo und anderswie erwählende – Gott vollstreckt, was er...beschlossen hat‘.]

79 Barth, *KD* II/2, 110. [‚Die *Erwählung Jesu Christi*‘.]

80 Barth, *KD* II/2, 157–159, 159–170.

3. The McCormack-Hunsinger Debate

3.1 The metaphysical priority of being or act: the logical ordering of the Trinity and election

In the preceding chapter, we demonstrated how Barth attempts to secure the reliability of revelation by eternalizing it backwards into the divine life and so identifying it with God's antecedent triunity and the primal decision of election. In this chapter, we will examine two competing interpretations of how Barth metaphysically underpins the validity of election as the source for our knowledge of God. As aforementioned, Barth recognizes that all knowledge of God is mediated through our knowledge of God's works *ad extra*, by way of the creaturely realities that God has chosen 'to testify to the divine objectivity'.[1] Even in the incarnation, God does not appear unmediated but rather clothed in flesh, as the human Jesus of Nazareth. It follows that the knowledge of faith can never withdraw from God's actuality to contemplate him *in abstracto*; hence Barth argues that being always follows act in God, epistemologically speaking.[2]

Barthian scholarship is intensely divided, however, on whether this epistemological logic is carried through by Barth metaphysically: does Barth justify the assertion that God's being must be *identified* directly with his revealed acts in history by positing that the divine being is *constituted* by the eternal act of election? That is, does Barth understand the subject of election to be the antecedently triune God who determines himself for incarnation *within this triune framework*, or is the self-determination of God actually a complete *self-constitution* that includes the generation of his triunity as the means to facilitate election? This question is crucial in interpreting the respective functions of the doctrines of the Trinity and election in Barth's *analogia temporalis*, since it determines whether Barth secures the reliability of revelation by arguing that it ultimately points back to God's primal *being* as triune or to his primal *act* of election.

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1 Barth, *KD* II/1, 17. [‚Zum Zeugnis der göttlichen Gegenständlichkeit'.]

2 Barth, *KD* II/1, 20–23, 31.

3.2 Bruce McCormack

3.2.1 Jesus as the subject and object of election: McCormack's radically actualist Barth

Bruce McCormack argues that Barth's entire doctrine of election is shaped by his key identification of Jesus as not only the object but also the subject of the election.[3] This identification marks a decisive shift from the Reformed theology of the seventeenth century in which the Logos was understood to be incarnate only as the *object* of election, on the grounds that it is only as a consequence of the decision of election

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3 Professor McCormack has graciously allowed me to see a draft version of a forthcoming essay (an 'Appendix' to the two sets of theses he wrote as part of a negotiated exchange with George Hunsinger, set to be published in German as part of an essay collection by De Gruyter), in which he outlines the revisions his interpretation of Barth has undergone since he first published his seminal article 'Grace and Being' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. In this essay, McCormack demarcates his interpretation into a "earlier" reading represented by many of his most influential writings (which are treated in this chapter), and a "mature" reading which he has advocated since 2013.

The first major shift in McCormack's position concerns what he calls a 'residual voluntarism' in the *Church Dogmatics*, which he argues Barth inherited from the Reformed tradition but exists in sharp tension with what Barth wants to say about the relationship between the Trinity and election (p. 5). McCormack had earlier tried to emulate Barth's juxtaposition of the claim that 'God would still be God without us' with his presentation of election as an eternal deciding that has never not taken place (p. 6). By contrast, McCormack's mature view eliminates this tension by dispensing with counterfactual possibility entirely and instead emphasizing the view that, for Barth, 'the relation of God to the world in Jesus Christ is intrinsic to God, essential to him' (8–9).

The second major shift in McCormack's interpretation of Barth has been to distance himself from his repeated statements that the Trinity is, for Barth, 'a function of election' (that is, that election must be first in our thinking) (p. 6–7). Even in his earlier writings, he had argued that 'God's self-constitution as triune and God's gracious election are not two acts but one and the same act' (p. 7). He now realizes this should have 'reminded' him that 'Trinity and election are equally primordial. Neither can have an ontological priority over the other. And so, neither can be the consequence of the other' (p. 7).

Despite these significant revisions, McCormack's earlier view remains relevant for the purposes of this book and shall be the focus of this section, as an illustration of a radically actualist interpretation of Barth's theology that, by virtue of this fact, contrasts significantly from the competing interpretation given by George Hunsinger. These two readings thus provide valuable representations of two distinct attitudes towards metaphysics in Barth's theology (and hence two poles of the tension between epistemological reliability and divine freedom I wish to trace in this book), which I will subsequently contrast with my own reading of Barth's metaphysics in chapter four. Furthermore, as McCormack himself notes (p. 6–7, n. 16), this early position, explicated foremost in 'Grace and Being', has become central to the way his position has been understood within the field of Barthian studies and thus best represents, alongside Hunsinger's interpretation, one of the two dominant interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics* in English-language scholarship.

that he becomes determined as such. As the subject of election, therefore, the Logos was thought of as necessarily undetermined.[4]

McCormack believes that Barth's identification of the subject of election as Jesus Christ means that he must deny the Logos a reality above and prior to the decision to be incarnate, and that he must deny the existence of a Logos *in se* separate from God's movement towards creation in election. That is, Barth must assert that 'the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity'.[5] This corollary demonstrates that the identification of Jesus as the subject of election is at least partially motivated by concerns about speculation: Barth fears that any reality given to a Logos *asarkos* above and prior to the decision of election would invite speculation as to his nature and, by extension, the ability to know God outside of his revelation.[6]

Underlying this concern about speculation is a concern regarding the divine ontology. For Barth, the essential question is how it would be possible for God to 'become' – that is, to enter into humanity and temporality – without undergoing an essential change that would result in an ontological 'rift in God' between his being *in se* and work *ad extra*.[7] Such a rift would undermine the reliability of revelation, making just the speculation Barth fears a theological imperative.

McCormack believes that up to *Church Dogmatics* II/2 Barth presupposed the classical Reformed doctrine of election, in which the decree of double predestination precedes the decree to effect its outcome (viz., the salvation of the elect) through Jesus Christ. In this case, however, the identity of the Logos *in se* (i. e., as the subject of election) is not determined by the decision to become incarnate but is already established prior to it. Since Barth wishes to maintain an ontological continuity between God *in se* and *ad extra* to avoid the conclusion that the Logos changes essentially in the incarnation, McCormack argues that the early Barth could only argue that the decision for incarnation results in 'something being added to that already completed identity; an addition which has no effect upon what he is essentially'.[8] McCormack argues this means, however, that the Logos' identity as the redeemer tells us nothing about the Logos *in se*, reducing it to 'a role he plays' that has 'no significance for his eternal being'.[9]

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4 Bruce L. McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–95.

5 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 94–95.

6 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 95–96. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 181.

7 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 96.

8 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 97.

9 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 97.

This problem emerges because, in the essentialist metaphysics that Barth inherited, a "person" is 'complete in and for itself apart from and prior to all the decisions, acts, and relations that make up the sum total of the lived existence of the person in question'.[10] McCormack argues that this segregates "essence" and "existence" such that 'whatever happens on the level of existence has no effect on that which a person is essentially'.[11] When this thought is applied to christology, we must inevitably conclude that nothing that happens in the human nature of Jesus has any consequences for the divine personhood of the Logos.[12]

For McCormack, the early Barth thus made his claim that 'God is the subject of a *real* human being and acting' essentially unintelligible.[13] Moreover, this reluctance to ascribe "becoming" to the Word in a meaningful sense ultimately cast doubt upon 'Barth's entire christological edifice (i. e., the insistence upon two natures whose unity consists in the *singularity* of Subject in whom both natures find their ontological ground)'.[14] He concludes that the earlier Barth tended towards Nestorianism, because his identification of the becoming squarely with the human nature of Jesus makes this human nature a subject in its own right.[15]

Importantly, McCormack links this fatal essentialism to the antecedent trinitarian framework in which the earlier Barth understood the incarnation, since it asserts that 'God's Word would still be the Word even if the incarnation had never happened'.[16] Once Barth subscribed to this framework, therefore, the only way he could reconcile divine immutability with the incarnation was 'by driving a wedge between what the divine Word truly is (in and for himself) and what he might seem to be (but is not!) through the verbal ascription to him of acts and experiences which are not really his own'.[17]

However, McCormack identifies a decisive shift in Barth's theological thought with his explicit treatment of election in *Church Dogmatics* II/2. With this shift, the "mature Barth" asserted that the electing God is not unknown but is rather 'a God whose very being – already in eternity – is determined, defined by what he reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ; viz., a God of love and mercy towards the

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10 Bruce L. McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Historicized Christology: Just How "Chalcedonian" Is It?', in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 211.

11 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 211.

12 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 211.

13 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

14 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

15 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

16 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

17 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

whole human race'.[18] That is, Barth came to understand election as 'the event in God's life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity', meaning the decision of election is not a 'mere role-play' but rather 'has ontological significance'.[19] By extension, Barth is able to argue that '[God] is not changed on an ontological level by [the event of the incarnation and death of Christ] for the simple reason that his being, from eternity, is determined as a being-for this event'.[20]

McCormack appeals to Barth's statement that God is a being-in-act, which he interprets to mean that Barth advocates an actualist ontology: that being 'is actualized in the decision for activity in time'.[21] The advantage of such an ontology is that God's being is thus 'constituted by His eternal act of turning toward the human race', meaning that this act is what God is "essentially" and hence that this essence 'is not hidden to human perception'.[22] Accordingly, 'we can trust that the love and mercy toward the whole human race demonstrated in Jesus' subjection of himself to death on a cross is 'essential' to God and that election is therefore universal in scope'.[23]

Since the incarnation is thus not to be understood as 'the incarnation of an absolute metaphysical subject', McCormack argues that Barth transposes the incarnation into new ontological categories.[24] The problem becomes no longer how to explain the union of an already complete abstract metaphysical subject 'with a historically constituted human "nature"', but rather how to understand 'the unity of a subject whose being is constituted both in time and in eternity by a twofold history'.[25] The category of "nature" is replaced with the category of "history", with "history" then integrated into the concept of "person". Thus, Barth understands election as God's act of taking humanity into 'the *event* of God's being'.[26] Since God elected to become human specifically in Jesus Christ, 'the human history of Jesus Christ is constitutive of the being and existence of God in the second of God's modes to the extent that the being and existence of the Second person of the Trinity cannot be rightly thought of in absence of this human history'.[27] However, it follows from this that 'all that occurs in and through and to this human is taken up into the divine

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18 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 97–98.
19 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 98.
20 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 98.
21 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 99.
22 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 99.
23 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 99.
24 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 222.
25 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 222.
26 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 222–223.
27 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 223.

life and made to be God's own', meaning that Jesus' suffering and death must also be understood as events in the divine life itself.[28]

Barth's concern in making these assertions is to convey that 'God does not cease to be God in that, in Jesus Christ, as creature and as sinner, God places himself under his own wrath, accusation, sentence, and judgement and, having done all of that, gives himself over to the experience of death'.[29] Rather, God does all this in fulfilment of his eternal self-determination and hence as the actualization of his true being. This means that God is in fact 'never seen more clearly as the God that he truly is than when he suffers death on a cross'.[30]

3.2.2 Jesus as the subject and product of election: a contradiction in terms?

A question that immediately arises from McCormack's actualist interpretation of Barth is how the second person of the Trinity can be the subject of the decision of election if he only comes into existence as an outcome of this decision. While McCormack expresses sympathy for this line of enquiry,[31] he does not provide any one comprehensive answer, instead offering various (and in some cases mutually exclusive) explanations. These various explanations are, however, united in the conviction that the perceived problem is actually just a human construction, resulting from our inability to comprehend the nature of divine decisions.

McCormack begins by noting that 'we think of decisions as involving deliberation and, therefore, as involving a before and an after. First, there must be a subject; without a subject there can be no act'.[32] He argues, however, that this is merely a product of anthropomorphic and temporal thinking; divine decisions, by contrast, are not limited to this structure because they are eternal and hence do not have any temporal sequence.[33] In short, McCormack here identifies the subjectact ordering of decisions as the product of temporal sequence. What results is an argument derived from the idea of perichoretic coinherence of different temporal forms in eternity to claim that causal reasoning is inapplicable to the intratrinitarian process of election: the decision of election generates the Son; however, since God is not limited to this temporal structure, the Son is able to coinhere in the eternal time prior to the decision such that he can be the subject of the very will by which he is generated.

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28 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 224–225.

29 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 225.

30 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 225.

31 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 218–219.

32 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 104.

33 McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 104.

Yet, McCormack immediately follows up this explanation by arguing that God is the subject of the act of election 'insofar as he gives himself (by an eternal act) his own being'.[34] With this statement, McCormack seemingly departs from his explanation by appeal to God's temporal peculiarity in favour of an explanation in terms of actualism. That is, since divine act is logically primary in God, this act generates the divine essence which can in retrospect be understood as God giving himself his own being (since God is constituted as the actor of this act). According to this explanation, McCormack's preceding rejection of the subjectact structure as a temporal construct is rendered either irrelevant or the result of a conflation of logical and temporal ordering.

Both explanations are seemingly overturned, however, by McCormack's further claim that 'we are only underscoring this point when we add that the 'one divine I' is fully himself in this second form (or 'person') and that if he makes a decision in his first form, he (the One Subject) is necessarily making it in his second and third forms as well. Seen in this light, to speak of Jesus Christ as the Subject of election is simply to affirm the oneness of God in his three modes of being'.[35] Here McCormack identifies the first person of the Trinity as the logically prior subject of the decision of election, reasserting the essenceact structure of essentialism and the existence of ordering in eternity. We are left with the assertion that the second person of the Trinity is so closely identified with the first that, while strictly speaking only the first person is the subject of election, in practical terms the second can also be identified as such.

3.2.3   The incarnation and notions of ontological significance

Having outlined McCormack's reading of Barth, I shall now offer a brief theological evaluation of his argument,[36] beginning with his claim that the earlier Barth's reluctance to ascribe "becoming" to the divine nature of the Word calls into question the hypostatic union. As noted above, McCormack ultimately concludes that Barth's original essentialist understanding of the incarnation tends towards Nestorianism by conceiving of Jesus' human nature as 'a subject in its own right, a subject of its own becoming'.[37] In reality, however, it is McCormack who has presupposed Nestorianism in his reading of Barth, creating a circular reading that reflects back

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34   McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 104.

35   McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 104.

36   Neither this evaluation nor the evaluation of George Hunsinger below (see 3. 3. 5.) purports to offer an exhaustive critique but simply to highlight key theological concerns arising from their proposed readings of Barth's theology. A further analysis of the two readings as interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics* itself will be offered in section 3. 4.

37   McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

this Nestorian presupposition as Barth's only remaining solution to the constructed problem. That is, for Barth, both the divine and human natures of Christ belong to the one person of the Word, meaning that one can coherently speak of the Word as the subject of a "becoming" if his human nature changes, without this requiring the divine nature to change also. The distinction McCormack draws between "human nature" and "the Word" misrepresents Barth's argument by falsely comparing nature with personhood and thus presupposing his own conclusion that the human nature must have its own personhood to be the subject of the becoming. McCormack accordingly ends up arguing that the only way for the Word to be the subject of a "becoming" is for the divine nature to change, thereby himself denying the hypostatic union along the lines of Nestorianism. When Barth talks about the human becoming of the incarnation having no ontological significance for the Word, however, he is referring specifically to the divine *nature*, since this is the correlate of ontology, while personhood is conversely the correlate of action.

McCormack is correct that the essentialist solution posits a distinction between what the Word is eternally and necessarily, and what he is only contingently and temporally. Moreover, as aforementioned, this solution means that the incarnation does not have ontological significance for the eternal nature of the Word *in se*, meaning that it does not affect the divine being. The problem with McCormack's criticisms here, however, is that they immediately beg the question of why the incarnation must have "ontological significance" for the divine being. As we have demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Barth's point is that God is truly known by virtue of the principle of *analogia temporalis*, which asserts that all of the Word's temporal actions *ad extra* correlate to eternal actions of triune interrelation and thus (as we shall demonstrate in chapter four) to his divine being. There are, broadly speaking, two reasons why McCormack discounts Barth's argument on this point. First, he does so because of the aforementioned Nestorian lens through which he reads the *Church Dogmatics*, in which the incarnation can only be relevant to the divine personhood of the Logos if it implicates the divine nature. This has been refuted above. Second, he does so because his metaphysical presuppositions do not allow for a distinction to be made between "being" on the one hand, and "mode of identification" on the other, creating a binary in which the election to incarnation is either constitutive of the divine being or is completely irrelevant for identifying God. As I shall show in chapter four on Barth's concept of God as a being-in-act, this does not reflect the argument of the *Church Dogmatics*, which conversely asserts that God can truly be identified on the basis of the contingent determination of his eternal being.

3.2.4 Is Jesus ever the subject of election?

As intimated above, a major weakness with McCormack's solution is his explanation for how Jesus can be the subject of a decision of which he is the outcome. We have already raised concerns regarding the coherence of the various solutions offered by McCormack, which ultimately suggests that he does not himself have a clear idea of how to understand Jesus as the subject of election within his actualist framework. We shall now heighten this critique by demonstrating that each of his proposed solutions are either unfeasible or result in serious theological problems.

First, we noted that McCormack attempts to dismiss the problem by claiming it is an anthropomorphism, on the basis that divine eternity does not include temporal sequence. This argument immediately faces the criticism, however, that an act needing a prior subject is at root not an issue of temporal but rather logical sequence. As the Dutch Presbyterian theologian Edwin van Driel notes, McCormack himself clearly admits of logical sequence in God, since his interpretation of Barth is centred around the logical sequence between election and the Trinity.[38] Furthermore, we observed that McCormack's argument that the Son is both the subject and object of the decision by which he is generated implicitly rejects the application of causal reasoning to God. This, however, invalidates the whole point of trying to argue that act (viz., election) *causes* being (viz., the Trinity) in God, fatally undermining McCormack's interpretation of Barth.

Another of McCormack's proposed solutions is to accept that, strictly speaking, God is the subject of election only in his first mode of being but to argue that, since God in his second mode is the same divine subject as God in his first mode, he can be said to be the subject of election in his second mode also. In this way, to speak of Jesus as the subject of election is to affirm the unity of the three persons of the Trinity. The issue with this solution, however, is that it notably creates the very problem McCormack is attempting to solve, since it forces him to accept that, strictly speaking, God only elects in his first mode – a mode which is even more unknown than that of the Logos *asarkos*.[39] Furthermore, this argument identifies a logically prior subject of the decision of election, making essence prior to act and so once again undermining the actualist framework it is supposed to explicate.

The Chicago Protestant theologian Kevin Hector observes that this solution also raises serious problems because, as McCormack himself affirms, God's decision to bind himself to us in election was free and thus could have been otherwise. Since the Father is identified as the one who makes this determination and so constitutes

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38 Edwin van Driel, 'Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 56.

39 Van Driel, 'Eternal Existence', 56.

himself as triune, and since God did not have to be God-with-us and so triune, it follows that only the Father is necessarily God, subordinating the Son and Holy Spirit as contingent. One way to avoid this problem would be to claim that the prior subject is not one of the three hypostases at all but rather a God behind them; however, this leads to the modalist position that the *true* God is this proposed fourth hidden behind the three revealed to us.[40] The only remaining option would be to claim that the original subject was completely undetermined prior to election; however, this immediately raises the question of on what grounds we can assert this decision was not simply capricious (since decisions are only non-capricious because they are rooted in the being of the subject who makes them).

This leaves us with one final explanation: a true actualism in which the subject-act sequence is replaced with a prior act which generates its actor. The reason why this solution is so difficult to read into Barth's statement and why, as McCormack notes, interpretations of the statement naturally fall into essentialist thinking is that, for a true actualism, to talk about a subject at all would be to beg the question. This is because to talk of a subject presupposes just the subject-act structure that a true actualism attempts to replace. Bearing this in mind, it is apparent that Barth's language of Jesus as the subject of election is not conducive to McCormack's argument that this is Barth's supreme actualist moment. Nonetheless, since this explanation is the only one not immediately refutable as unfeasible, it shall be necessary to explore it in more detail.

3.2.5 The devaluation of election as a real decision

Van Driel rightly notes that election is for McCormack an essential rather than accidental act, since McCormack is concerned to secure God's 'essential involvement in creation'.[41] Van Driel supports this interpretation by pointing to McCormack's statement that, for Barth, 'God chooses his essence in the same way that he chooses to create the world. Since both are primal decisions taken in eternity, however, neither can meaningfully be described as a choice between alternatives'.[42] Van Driel argues that, since an 'essential property' can be described as 'a property for which there are no alternatives', the properties that result from election (a decision whose outcome has no alternatives) must be essential properties.[43] Van Driel is correct in insisting that McCormack has to argue that there are no alternatives, since he would otherwise be forced to conclude that the entire divine constitution is made

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40 Kevin W. Hector, 'Immutability, Necessity and Triunity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 1 (2012): 67.

41 Van Driel, 'Eternal Existence', 52.

42 Van Driel, 'Eternal Existence', 52; citing McCormack, *The Untamed God*, 138, n. 31.

43 Van Driel, 'Eternal Existence', 52.

up of accidents (things that happen to be the case but are not essential for God to be God). By extension, he would have to admit that the primal act constituting God could have been different, which would have led to a substantially different type of God, undermining the reliability of revelation.

It should be noted that a lack of alternatives correlates with the classical view that God's act of creation was not the choice to actualize one of many possibilities, since the counterfactuals such a choice presupposes are part of creation and thus would not yet have existed. Nevertheless, since "freedom" is classically defined as "aseity" (a lack of external determination) rather than the modern sense of "liberty" (the extent to which one enjoys hypothetical possibilities), the decision can still be understood as free. While the lack of alternatives *per se* is not inherently problematic, therefore, the question is *on what basis* McCormack can claim there are no alternatives. In the classical tradition, this is ontologically underpinned by the divine nature; however, McCormack argues that any divine nature exists only subsequent to the decision of election. If McCormack thus ends up with a decision that is not grounded by any prior substance but whose outcome nevertheless has no alternatives, it is difficult to understand how it can be a decision in any meaningful sense at all, undermining its gracious nature.

Furthermore, if election is an essential act of the divine will, it follows that incarnation and creation (which election entails) are likewise essential acts.[44] Accordingly, while McCormack is able to affirm that God does not need humanity insofar as he actualizes his being as triune prior to creation (such that his being is not *per se* collapsed into creation), the logically corollary of his argument is that God has bound himself to humanity in election and thus actualizes his being as triune for humanity's sake. This means God is "dependent" on creation for his being insofar he cannot coherently be described without relation to creation. McCormack is able to overcome the negative force of this implication by asserting that God has *freely* bound himself to humanity; however, this means that McCormack's defence hinges on election being an act of grace (i. e., that God need not have elected and does not gain from this election). Yet it is not at all clear how an act without any sort of prior subject can be considered a real decision rather than pure will. As such, since McCormack's solution is unable intelligibly to secure the gracious nature of election, he is unable to maintain divine freedom in God's act of binding himself to creation.

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44 Van Driel, 'Eternal Existence', 54.

3.3   George Hunsinger

3.3.1   Trinity and election in the *Church Dogmatics*

While McCormack argues that God would not be triune without election, George Hunsinger argues that election could not have happened without God's triunity since 'election presupposes God's prior reality as Trinity'.[45] He appeals to the fact that statements to this effect are found not only prior to *Church Dogmatics* II/2, but also within II/2 and subsequent volumes.[46] Hunsinger sees this as evidence of the fact that, 'although Barth's views continued to develop in the course of the *Church Dogmatics*…there is no fundamental break between II/1 and II/2'.[47]

Hunsinger's examination of this evidence begins with several passages in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 in which Barth affirms that God was already triune prior to election. In such passages, he argues, 'the acting subject of this choice is, unmistakably, the eternal Son', and election is understood as 'an act of self-determination, not self-constitution'.[48] He points, for example, to Barth's statement that election is 'primarily a *determination* of the love of the Father and the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (emphasis Hunsinger),[49] arguing that Barth's choice of the term 'determination' rather than "constitution" here means that he understands the Trinity to determine to be for humanity 'what it already is in itself, i. e., a fellowship of love and freedom'.[50] This is because 'something can be "determined" only if it already exists'.[51] Likewise, Hunsinger notes that Barth states God is living and active in himself through 'his inner relationships as Father, Son and Holy Spirit',[52] which he argues makes clear that God is already living and active in himself by virtue of his triunity prior to a relation *ad extra*. Barth goes on to say that God does not, therefore, *become* living in the decision to work *ad extra*, but merely becomes the living God he already is *in a different way*.[53]

Hunsinger concludes that, even in *Church Dogmatic* II/2, Barth consistently spoke of a God who would always and in all circumstances have been triune, not a

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45 George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2015), xi.

46 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, xi–xii.

47 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 68.

48 George Hunsinger, 'Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth', *Modern Theology* 24, no. 2 (2008): 187–188. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 101.

49 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 187–188. See Barth, *CD* II/2, 169.

50 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 187–188.

51 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 181–182.

52 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 187–188. See Barth, *CD* II/2, 175.

53 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 187–188.

God who only *might* have been triune without his work *ad extra* as it actually exists. He argues that Barth makes clear that 'election represents the free overflowing of the superabundant glory of the triune God' rather than the actualization of a potency or removal of an internal deficit.[54] Furthermore, he claims that 'Barth explicitly warns against "absolutizing" God's pretemporal decision of election' by regarding it 'as constituting rather than expressing God's inmost trinitarian reality'.[55] For Hunsinger, Barth's point is that 'we must not mistake election as the supreme form of God's freedom, mystery and righteousness, as if God were not already supremely free, mysterious, and righteous in himself as the antecedent eternal Trinity'.[56]

3.3.2   Barth's use of ontology

Hunsinger recognizes that the *Church Dogmatics* contains both passages suggesting actualism and passages suggesting essentialism. He understands this to reflect Barth's rejection of formal and systematic ontology on the basis that such ontology always threatens to become a framework into which theology must be moulded to fit.[57] Nevertheless, while Barth always rejects formal ontology as a 'controlling system' in his theology, Hunsinger argues that he does make use of it in an eclectic or ad hoc way.[58] As such, he describes Barth's theology as 'actualistic in some ways while embracing classical metaphysics in other ways'.[59] To substantiate this claim, Hunsinger appeals to *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 192–210, arguing that this section contains two distinct endings, in which Barth first presents his points in actualist terms and then restates the same points in essentialist terms. Hunsinger considers this to be a prime example of Barth jumping between essentialism to actualism because he doesn't feel bound to one particular metaphysical system, and can take from both on the basis that God cannot be contained by an external metaphysical framework.[60]

We must be clear, therefore, that Hunsinger does not reject actualism in Barth's theology; however, he identifies the primal act of God not as the event of revelation but the eternal act of triune relationality. As such, Hunsinger notes that the motif of actualism is ubiquitous wherever Barth speaks of 'occurrence, happening, event, history, decision, and act' and even that Barth 'thinks primarily in terms of events

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54 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 51–54. See Barth, *CD* II/2, 121, 125–6.

55 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 55. See Barth, *CD* II/2, 25.

56 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 55.

57 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 2–4. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* III/3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 442.

58 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 2–4.

59 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 4–5.

60 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 103–104.

and relationships rather than monadic or self-contained substances'.[61] Barth describes God's being as 'a being in act', which means both that 'God's being cannot be described apart from the basic act in which God lives' and that 'God lives in a set of active relations'.[62]

Hunsinger argues, however, that Barth at no point states that the divine being is constituted by the divine act; rather, Barth's point is that 'God's being and act are inseparable'.[63] For Hunsinger, this means that 'act and being for Barth are each ontologically basic'.[64] Thus, for Barth, the paired terms will/nature and being/act 'always coexist in a pattern of coordination, not in a pattern of priority and subordination or of antecedence and consequence'.[65] This means that, 'no matter which one we start with, the other is always already implicated in it irreducibly and primordially':[66] the divine being is not a consequence of the divine act, nor is the divine act a consequence of the divine being.[67]

3.3.3   *Analogia temporalis* and the reliability of revelation

As to the key ontological question of how God can become incarnate without undergoing any essential change, Hunsinger argues that Barth grounds his answer in God's triunity itself. Specifically, he argues that 'everything that God does in time finds its antecedent ground in eternity' by virtue of God's prior triunity.[68] Thus, God can be loving towards the world 'because God is already eternally loving in himself'; God can relate to the world in freedom 'because God is already free in himself'; God can reveal himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit 'because God is already trinitarian in himself'.[69] Since God's actions *ad extra* 'always correspond to something "in his own essence"', therefore, they require no essential change on God's part.[70]

By extension, Hunsinger argues that God does not need to be constituted by the decision of election because he is already complete in himself prior to this decision. In the same way, he argues that election does not determine the Logos, who is already

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61 George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 30.

62 Hunsinger, *How to Read Barth*, 30.

63 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 180.

64 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 180.

65 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 106.

66 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 106.

67 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 180.

68 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 7–8.

69 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 8.

70 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 132. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 496.

determinate in himself, but rather gives him 'a new and secondary determination'.[71] Thus, by virtue of election, 'the Logos *asarkos* becomes *also* the Logos *incarnandus* without ceasing to be the Logos *asarkos*'.[72] As such, Hunsinger asserts that the divine self-determination in election and the incarnation presupposes rather than alters God's 'eternal constituents' and 'essential predications'.[73] Instead, it 'adds a series of differentiae to them… a new set of material determinations that distinguish [God's] being relative to what it was (logically and ontologically) before'.[74] Nonetheless, God would be *essentially* what he is without these differentiae and he remains *essentially* what he is with the addition of them.[75]

In *Church Dogmatics* III/1 Barth describes the relationship between God's eternal triune fellowship in himself and his fellowship with the creature in terms of 'correspondence',[76] which Hunsinger unpacks to mean an 'asymmetrical unity-in-distinction'.[77] The "asymmetry" reflects the fact that 'the two forms of the Trinity are not reversible, nor can they be collapsed into each other', meaning that while the eternal form would be unchanged without the temporal form, the temporal form requires the eternal form as its prototype.[78] The "unity-in-distinction" reflects the fact that any continuity between what God does in the economy and what he is in eternity always exists 'in the midst of ontological discontinuity – the discontinuity between eternity and time'.[79] Paralleling the language of the Chalcedonian formula, Hunsinger thus argues that for Barth the temporal and eternal forms 'coexist (1) without separation or division, (2) without confusion or change, and (3) with the eternal form taking precedence over the temporal form (asymmetry)'.[80]

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71 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 10–12, 77.

72 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 12.

73 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 139.

74 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 139.

75 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 139–140.

76 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 19–20. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* III/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 50.

77 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 83.

78 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 83.

79 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 100.

80 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 102.

3.3.4   Jesus Christ as the subject of election: the role of the Logos *asarkos* in Barth's theology

Hunsinger notes that in *Church Dogmatics* III/1 Barth explicitly speaks of the reality of the Logos *asarkos* not only prior to election and the incarnation but even 'over against and along with the incarnation'.[81] As such, while Hunsinger agrees with McCormack that Barth sees the Logos *asarkos* as 'identical' with the incarnate Son, he concludes that this identity must only be meant in a qualified sense (*secundum quid*). He appeals to *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, where Barth states that while we must not refer to the eternal Word in abstract, this second person 'in himself and as such' is not the reconciler, is not revealed to us and is not God-for-us 'either ontologically or epistemologically'.[82] The concept of the Logos *asarkos* is a necessary part of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity to ensure that God's actions *ad extra* have a 'free basis in the inner being and essence of God'.[83] At the same time, however, Barth wants to stress that, in the context of revelation and God's work of atonement, it is 'pointless' and 'impermissible' to speak of the second person *in se* 'in such a way that we ascribe to this person another form than that which God himself has given in willing *to reveal himself and to act outwards*'.[84] Thus, to say that Barth asserts the identity between the Logos *asarkos* and Jesus Christ *secundum quid* means that this identification only holds with regards to God's relationship to the world, with the point being that 'God's relationship *to the world* is determined from all eternity by Jesus Christ alone'.[85]

In short, 'because of God's pretemporal decision of election, the Logos *asarkos* in itself and as such is not relevant to God's relationship to the world'.[86] Without ceasing to exist as *asarkos*, the Logos has been determined from all eternity as Jesus Christ; hence, it is Jesus Christ alone 'who establishes all God's ways and works with the world'.[87] We cannot go behind the divine decision of election when considering God's relations with the world, so we also cannot go behind Jesus Christ (present in eternity in some sense) when considering the eternal Son of God. That being said, Hunsinger argues that the aforementioned reference to the Logos 'in himself and as such' in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 makes clear that, for Barth, the Logos *asarkos* still exists in the intratrinitarian life of God. That is, while God is totally for-us, his

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81 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 16–17.

82 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 25; Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 188–189. See Barth, *CD* IV/1, 52.

83 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 25. See Barth, *CD* IV/1, 52.

84 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 26. See Barth, *CD* IV/1, 52.

85 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 26.

86 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 27.

87 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 27.

life 'is not exhausted by his relationship to the world', since it does not follow from the statement 'God is never unrelated to his creatures' that 'God is related only to his creatures'.[88]

To describe the relationship between the Logos *asarkos* and *ensarkos*, Hunsinger again employs the term 'asymmetrical unity-in-distinction', reflecting the fact that these two phrases refer to two different forms of the same Logos which are 'indivisibly one'.[89] He explains that 'by free divine grace there is no Logos *asarkos* that is not *also* the Logos *ensarkos*, and no Logos *ensarkos* that does not presuppose its *ground* in the Logos *asarkos*'.[90] However, while the two forms coexist and coinhere, neither loses its distinctive identity because they coexist and coinhere 'in a single divine action that is inwardly differentiated and complex'.[91] As such, 'the two forms of the one Logos remain abidingly distinct' rather than the Logos *asarkos* being absorbed completely into the Logos *ensarkos*.[92] As before, the fact that this unity-in-distinction is asymmetrical means that it is irreversible: 'The Logos *asarkos* is irreversibly antecedent even as the Logos *ensarkos* is irreversibly subsequent'.[93] The primary form is *asarkos*, which is 'the logical and ontological ground of its secondary form as *ensarkos*'.[94] Furthermore, while the Logos is *asarkos* by nature, it is *ensarkos* only by grace,[95] meaning that the latter is eternally contingent and so completely free, rather than stemming from any internal or external necessity.[96]

Having outlined Hunsinger's argument that Jesus is only identical to the Logos *secundum quid*, we must now turn to assess how Hunsinger nevertheless understands Jesus to be the subject of election and therefore as existent from all eternity. Like McCormack, Hunsinger has a number of lenses through which he understands this issue. His first explanation is that 'God's decision of election involves a pretemporal form of the hypostatic union'.[97] That is, in the pretemporal decision of election in which 'the eternal Son elects to unite the human essence of Jesus to himself', a union of the two natures already takes place such that the eternal Son is no longer just the Son of God but becomes also the Son of Man.[98] This means that, even in pretemporal eternity, by virtue of election, 'the human essence and will of Jesus

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88 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 27–29.

89 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 57–58.

90 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 57–58.

91 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 58.

92 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 58.

93 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 58.

94 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 58–59.

95 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 58–59.

96 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 191.

97 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 71.

98 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 71. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 84.

are "enhypostatic" with the divine "person" of the eternal Son (proleptically)'.[99] Accordingly, while the electing subject is strictly speaking the eternal Son, in this decision he 'makes himself really but contingently (and irreversibly) identical with Jesus of Nazareth' and, in this (enhypostatic) sense, 'it can therefore be said that already in pretemporal eternity "Jesus Christ is the Subject of election"'.[100]

Explaining, Hunsinger appeals, second, to divine foreknowledge. For Barth, he contends, it is not that God knows things because they are reality; rather they are reality because God knows them as such.[101] It follows that 'Jesus Christ is the subject and object of election in eternity because that is how he is known by God'.[102] That is, Jesus 'is present at the beginning because God foreknows, elects, and appoints him to be the One in whom all things are determined by grace'.[103] In the eternal sight of God, therefore, the Word had already taken on a human nature and so Jesus Christ already existed concretely in pretemporal eternity.[104] Hunsinger notes in this regard that, 'because everything that exists outside God exists first of all in God, in his eternal sight or foreknowledge, it follows "that [God's] knowledge is not actually tied to the distinction between past, present, and future being"', facilitating the argument made here.[105]

Third, Hunsinger argues that Jesus Christ can be said to be the subject of election because the eternal Son and the incarnate Son are numerically the same; hence Barth can refer to the Son as Jesus prior to the hypostatic union in a way prospective to the later incarnation. Hunsinger likens this to talking about "the Queen" being born at time t even though the Queen only became queen after her coronation, with the literal meaning "the Queen (that is, the baby who would become the Queen after her coronation) was born at time t". In the same way, Hunsinger argues we can unpack Barth's statement as the claim that "Jesus Christ (that is, the undetermined Son who would become Jesus Christ after the incarnation) is the subject of election". Strictly speaking, however, it is only this subsequent Son *incarnatus* who is identical with Jesus Christ, while the Son in himself 'is not even *incarnandus*, because the Son qua Son is properly defined without reference to his being *incarnandus*'.[106]

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99 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 71.

100 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 71–72. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* I/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 163.

101 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 49. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 599.

102 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 49.

103 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 49.

104 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 50. See Barth, *CD* III/1, 51, 54.

105 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 50. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 559.

106 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 182.

Fourth and finally, Hunsinger appeals to Barth's understanding of eternity as a 'simultaneity-in-distinction and distinction-in-simultaneity'.[107] He explains that, *sub specie aeternitatis*, 'the cross of Christ, the last judgement, and pre-temporal election are not three different events, but three different forms of one and the same event'.[108] This is because Barth's doctrine of eternity (which shall be covered in more detail in chapter six, below) is perichoretic such that each of the aforementioned events may be understood to contain the other two 'by way of anticipation or recapitulation, so that, without losing their individuality or destroying that of others, they participate and are active and revealed in them'.[109] This means, for example, that the cross (without losing its historicity) is somehow truly present to God in the pre-temporal decision of election. Accordingly, 'the Son *incarnatus* subsists in the eternal Son without ceasing to be *incarnatus*', meaning the Logos *asarkos* and Jesus Christ are not only numerically one *qua* subjecthood but actually coinhere with each other without losing their distinctiveness.[110] 'Because of this unity-in-distinction, or coinherence, it can be said (*secundum quid*, not *simpliciter*) that the Son *incarnatus*, or Jesus Christ, is the subject of election'.[111]

3.3.5 The return of the *Deus absconditus*

Hunsinger's interpretation of Barth offers a thorough analysis of the *Church Dogmatics* that recognizes the indispensability of counterfactual freedom in Barth's argument. However, in making sure to give sufficient space to divine freedom by emphasizing the determinate reality of the Trinity *in se* for Barth, Hunsinger also makes space for precisely the *Deus absconditus* McCormack warns against. That is, there emerges out of Hunsinger's interpretation of Barth a higher reality of God behind and above all of his actions in the economy by which we know him, yet unaffected by them, and hence himself epistemologically inaccessible.

While Hunsinger follows Barth in asserting that this prior reality is of no practical consequence to theology, it is notable that Barth grounds this assertion on the fact that God's self-determination is robustly ontological in character. It is for this reason alone that we can assert that who and what God is has been revealed without remainder to us, and hence that any hypothetically necessary prior reality is of no epistemological relevance. By contrast, Hunsinger posits a stronger dichotomy between God's logically prior reality and the logically subsequent addition of 'differentiae' of markedly lesser ontological quality. As such, although he recognizes

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107 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 183.
108 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 183.
109 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 183–184. See Barth, *CD* IV/2, 296.
110 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 184.
111 Hunsinger, 'Election and Trinity', 184.

Barth's assertion that this self-determination belongs to God no less than his essential nature, he is unable to provide any substantiation for how this is coherent within his interpretation. As a consequence, he also has no way of explaining how statements as "ontological" as the claim that election is the 'event which constitutes the divine being'[112] can be read to refer merely to the essentially inconsequential addition of material determinations to God.

3.4 Critical evaluation as interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics*

3.4.1 Bruce McCormack

McCormack's interpretation of Barth's thought is remarkable in its scope and clarity, taking seriously those passages in the *Church Dogmatics* that have often been ignored due to their problematic nature and drawing out their logical implications in a systematic way. He importantly recognizes that purely essentialist understandings of the incarnation common to readings of Barth dichotomize God's relationship with humanity from who God is essentially in a way antithetical to Barth's conviction in the unsurpassability of christological revelation. Nonetheless, McCormack's concern to do justice to those underrepresented actualist statements in the *Church Dogmatics* and to use them as the lens through which to read the text as a whole results at times in an overinterpretation of Barth. This is because his desire to carry through Barth's concern to secure the reliability of revelation loses a sense of the context in which this concern is situated, namely how to balance such epistemological reliability with divine freedom in, and hence the gracious nature of, the economy of salvation.

The result is that McCormack can only explain the continued presence of "essentialist" statements in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* by resorting to the claim that Barth was inconsistent: that the continued presence of such statements serves 'as a kind of limit-concept whose purpose is to point to the importance of the divine freedom.'[113] McCormack argues that 'Barth knew of no other way to secure the freedom of God in election' within his actualist framework than by lapsing back into an essentialist ontology, and so returned to essentialism throughout the rest of the *Church Dogmatics*.[114] Accordingly, McCormack acknowledges that 'Barth was

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112 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 141. [,So ist er Gott. Er ist es, indem er an diesem Geschehen teilnimmt, das das göttliche Sein ausmacht'.]

113 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 212.

114 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 217, n. 45.

not always consistent – even in *CD* II/2 – in carrying through the logic of his basic claim that *Jesus Christ* is the electing God'.[115]

As Hunsinger notes, the problem with this logic is that it makes McCormack's argument irrefutable, since any evidence cited from the *Church Dogmatics* can always be explained away as nothing more than evidence that Barth's thought was not fully worked out. We must concur that such contrary evidence as Hunsinger outlines in his own reading of Barth represents a significant problem for McCormack's interpretation.[116]

3.4.2   George Hunsinger

By contrast, what sets apart Hunsinger's interpretation of Barth is the way he engages with the minutiae of Barth's argument without losing sight of the broader context and overall coherence of the *Church Dogmatics*. It is this ability which allows him to recognize the indispensability of counterfactual freedom in Barth's argument, and hence to correctly identify the priority of God's triunity over election for Barth, without resorting to a simple essentialist reading of the text that dismisses key actualist passages as inconvenient.

Nevertheless, Hunsinger's exegesis of the *Church Dogmatics* is undermined by a significant conflation. Hunsinger rightly observes that Barth is opposed to the idea of constructing a theology along predetermined ontological lines (derived from creation), on the basis that this always risks creating a conceptual scheme in which God is conditioned by the world. However, he commits the *non sequitur* that Bath must therefore reject any type of coherent ontology whatsoever. On the contrary, Barth makes statements with clear ontological implications throughout the *Church Dogmatics*; often, moreover, referring back to these statements in order to build on them in making further ontological statements – a key index of a desire for systematic coherence. One might, for example, observe how Barth engages in an extended discussion of God's eternity in *CD* II/1, which he then employs as an ontological framework to make sense of his doctrine of election in II/2, and then draws on again in III/2 in discussing humanity's "fallen time" and the time of Jesus' revelation.[117] Barth is happy to build such ontological frameworks because in doing

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115 McCormack, 'Barth's Historicized Christology', 217, n. 45. See, for example, Barth, *CD* II/2, 94.

116 Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*, 21.

117 The British Methodist theologian Tom Greggs correctly recognizes that the doctrine of eternity in *CD* II/1 forms a unity with II/2, since it 'provides the framework within which talk of the eternal election of Jesus Christ is meaningful' and immediately leads 'into the radical re-description of election and pre-destination in II/2'. As such, while Greggs agrees with McCormack that Barth reworked his doctrine of election after starting the *Church Dogmatics*, he argues that the dependence of this revised doctrine of election on the doctrine of eternity immediately preceding it means that

so he always strictly adheres to the criterion that they be drawn *a posteriori* directly from revelation rather than employed *a priori* as universal frameworks derived from creation.

The second key issue with Hunsinger's interpretation of Barth that prevents him from recognizing a coherent ontology in the *Church Dogmatics* is his assumption that the equal weight Barth gives to being and act in God correlates to a piecemeal adoption of both actualism and essentialism at different points rather than one consistent ontology in which the two are indissoluble. As we noted above, Hunsinger recognizes that, for Barth, the paired terms will/nature and being/act 'always coexist in a pattern of coordination, not in a pattern of priority and subordination or of antecedence and consequence. Each of the paired terms is logically and ontologically basic'. Furthermore, he even notes that, 'no matter which one we start with, the other is always already implicated in it irreducibly and primordially'. Unfortunately, however, Hunsinger never carries through the logic of this mutually presupposed relationship to understand being and act as simultaneous in God, instead concluding that Barth must regard them simply as equal alternatives.

Finally, it is notable that Hunsinger's explanation for the presence of both essentialist and actualist statements in the *Church Dogmatics* is subject to the very critique he employs against McCormack. As we noted above, Hunsinger rejects McCormack's appeal to 'lapses' back to essentialism in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* on the basis that this makes his thesis unfalsifiable. This immediately raises the question, however, of why Hunsinger's own appeal to "piecemeal adoption" of both essentialism and actualism is not equally unfalsifiable: if McCormack is in fact correct and the *Church Dogmatics* does contain genuine ontological inconsistencies, Hunsinger could always explain away any evidence of this as Barth simply jumping between essentialism and actualism to suit his agenda.

The foregoing analysis of the McCormack-Hunsinger debate thus shows that, while both positions have some basis in Barth's work, neither is satisfactory with respect to the full range of theological concerns at play in the *Church Dogmatics*. It is because neither interpretation is able to reflect the equilibrium Barth establishes between the reliability of christological revelation and divine freedom that neither interpretation is able comprehensively to explain all of Barth's statements. As such, both are ultimately forced to defend their respective interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics* by appealing to formal inconsistencies in Barth's presentation, which each of them tries to explain away in rather unsatisfactory fashions (viz., as 'lapses' into essentialism or as arbitrary jumps between essentialism and actualism). In

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Barth must have developed his mature theology *before* he wrote *CD* II/1 (Tom Greggs, 'The Order and Movement of Eternity: Karl Barth on the Eternity of God and Creaturely Time', in *Eternal God, Eternal Life: Theological Investigations into the Concept of Immortality*, ed. Philip G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 1–2).

the next three chapters, I will attempt to chart a course out of this cul-de-sac via a threefold examination of the metaphysics of the *Church Dogmatics*.

4.   Barth's Metaphysics I: God as a Being-in-Act

4.1   The metaphysical indissolubility of being and act

For all their differences of interpretation, McCormack and Hunsinger share the basic conclusion that Barth did not have a consistent ontology; and this conclusion has become the common framework within which anglophone discussion of Barth's theology now takes place. For Hunsinger, Barth picks and chooses the desired aspects of essentialism and actualism at different points on the basis that God cannot be encapsulated in any one ontological system. For McCormack, the continued existence of essentialist statements that cannot be downplayed as "lapses" are accepted as a conscious "limit-concept" to secure divine freedom, since Barth had not worked out how to do this within actualism. In contrast to both positions, this chapter proposes a fresh reading of Barth, founded on the conviction that there is in fact a coherent, intelligible vision of the divine ontology that can be traced out in the *Church Dogmatics*, and which can thus make sense of the various passages that have proved so contentious between McCormack and Hunsinger.

To trace out this ontology, we must begin by examining Barth's discussion of the relationship between being and act. Yet when we do, we find that Barth actually disputes the use of these categories altogether – something all the more surprisingly considering how they have dominated the debate up to this point. Instead, he explicitly states his preference for speaking of 'the reality of God' on the basis that the term 'holds together being and act, (rather than tearing them apart like the concept of "essence")'.[1] This terminology reflects Barth's view that there is no way to transcend divine action to contemplate a purely essential God, not only due to epistemological limitation but also because divine action inherently cannot be transcended. Yet, while this point has been rightly highlighted by McCormack, his reading neglects the fact that Barth's rationale is also reversible: since Barth rejects a dichotomy between being and act, it is also true that if God is simply absolute spirit (and thus has no ontologically prior "nature"), 'then he also does nothing, then in fact he can do nothing'.[2] We must be clear that Barth is not, therefore, positing the

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1 Barth, *KD* II/1, 293. [,In dem Sein und Tat zusammenfassenden (und nicht wie der Begriff „Wesen" auseinanderreißenden!) Begriff „Die *Wirklichkeit* Gottes".]

2 Barth, *KD* II/1, 299. [,Wenn Gott nämlich keine Natur hat, wenn er jener chemisch gereinigte absolute Geist ist, dann tut er auch nichts, dann kann er sogar nichts tun'.] It should be noted that this passage also explicitly refutes McCormack's conception of election as the primal divine act by which a completely undetermined subject constitutes his nature.

priority of act over being, as understood by McCormack, but rather arguing that being and act are always united in the divine life.

For Barth, therefore, at the beginning there exists neither an act that subsequently determines the divine being, nor a being that subsequently engages in act; rather, at the beginning, being and act coexist equiprimordially and indissolubly. I propose that *this* is what Barth means when he speaks of God as a 'being-in-act'. We see references to this equiprimordiality and indissolubility at multiple points in the *Church Dogmatics*. For example, Barth claims that the incarnation, suffering and death constitute both the 'activation' and 'demonstration' of the divine being, with the use of these terms in parallel making clear that act both grounds *and* expresses the divine being, precluding the metaphysical priority of either being or act.[3] Likewise, Barth speaks of the incarnation and atonement as the actualization of the divine essence, while at the same time noting that 'the *divine* essence of course requires no actualization' since even the Son 'did not first need his incarnation…to become actual'.[4] Most succinctly, Barth summarizes my thesis in his statement that 'it is as God wills that he is God, and as he is God that he wills'.[5]

Accordingly, while it is appropriate to affirm the logical antecedence of God's triunity to election in the *Church Dogmatics*, it is also important to recognize that Barth understands God's triunity as itself act, allowing him to speak of God's eternal being as 'his act as Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.[6] As Barth explains, 'God *is* insofar as he *acts* from eternity in his inner relationships as Father, Son and Holy Spirit';[7] hence, for God to be triune is for him to be engaged in dynamic intra-trinitarian relation, with the divine nature both conditioning and being conditioned by the character of this relation.

It is worth highlighting in this context that Barth's statements on the relative ordering of love and freedom in God correlate, respectively, to his account of the logical ordering of being and act; hence, his examination of these two perfections parallels his statements noted above. Most explicitly, Barth asserts that it belongs to God's very being to be both loving and free, 'not in separation but in unity, yet

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3 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 231. [‚Der Weg seiner *Fleischwerdung* ist als solcher die Betätigung, die Bewährung, die Offenbarung seiner *Gottheit*, seiner *Gottessohnschaft*'.]

4 Barth, *KD* IV/2, 126. [‚Bedarf das *göttliche* Wesen freilich keiner Verwirklichung… Es bedurfte auch als das göttliche Wesen des Sohnes nicht erst dessen Fleischwerdung, seiner Existenz als Mensch und seiner Tat in seiner Einheit mit dem Menschen Jesus von Nazareth, um wirklich zu werden'.]

5 Barth, *KD* II/1, 618. [‚Indem Gott will, ist er Gott und indem er Gott ist, will er'.]

6 Barth, *KD* II/1, 306. [‚Seine Tat als Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist'.]

7 Barth, *KD* II/2, 192. [‚Gott *ist*, indem er in seinen inneren Beziehungen als der Vater, der Sohn und der Heilige Geist von Ewigkeit her *handelt*'.] See also, Barth, *KD* IV/2, 56–58, where Barth asserts the actuality of the Son.

nevertheless not in the collapse but in the differentiation of this duality'.[8] He rejects the tendency to think of God's love chiefly in his fellowship with creation and God's freedom chiefly as his transcendence over creation. This distinction cannot be sustained, he argues, because God's freedom also denotes his transcendence over creation even in his fellowship with it, and because his transcendence is disclosed and exercised nowhere other than in this fellowship. Barth argues that we thus cannot divide love and freedom by arguing that God is 'the one who loves in order then to be, somewhere and somehow in contradistinction to that, also still free': God's love does not surrender his freedom but is the supreme exercise of it.[9]

Nevertheless, there do exist a number of statements that seemingly advocate the priority of love over freedom, suggesting that God's freedom (understood as act) is only ever found as an expression of his prior love (understood as essence). For example, in *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Barth states that 'the divinity of God consists in the fact that he loves',[10] for which reason he argues that everything we say about the divine being must at its core expound it as the being of 'the one who loves eternally'.[11] As such, he asserts that divine freedom should be understood specifically to condition the nature of God's life and love (that he lives and loves freely), seemingly presenting a subordination of divine freedom to this living and loving.[12]

In the wider context of Barth's thought, however, it seems wise to interpret passages such as these as epistemological in nature. Contrary to the traditional theological practice of beginning with God's "incommunicable" attributes (corresponding to divine freedom) and only subsequently treating the "communicable attributes" (corresponding to divine love), Barth argues that the logic of revelation means that we should treat the disclosure of God first and his concealment only secondarily. This reflects his conviction that revelation is fundamentally the revelation of divine grace, with attributes like omnipotence emerging only secondarily to establish God's transcendence. Nonetheless, Barth makes clear that divine concealment (associated with the perfections of freedom) is complementary to divine disclosure (associated with the perfections of love), since it is included – and only

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8 Barth, *KD* II/1, 386. [‚Dann ist eben das sein Wesen: daß er Beides ist, nicht in einer Trennung, sondern in der Einheit, aber wiederum nicht in der Aufhebung, sondern in der Unterscheidung dieses Doppelten'.]

9 Barth, *KD* II/1, 387. [‚Gott ist ja nicht der Liebende, um dann irgendwo und irgendwie im Unterschied dazu auch noch frei zu sein'.]

10 Barth, *KD* II/1, 309. [‚Er ist darin Gott, es besteht darin das Göttliche Gottes, daß er liebt'.]

11 Barth, *KD* II/1, 283. [‚Es ist diese Seligkeit des Liebens Gottes aber darin begründet, daß er…die Liebe selber, der ewig Liebende ist'.]

12 Barth, *KD* II/1, 338–340.

manifests itself truly – in the latter. That is, it is only when the mystery of God is disclosed that it is understood to *be* a mystery.[13]

A number of statements in the *Church Dogmatics* make the point that love and freedom are each implied in the other, and hence that we cannot divide them in such a way as to grant either logical priority. For example, Barth states that 'there is no love of God in itself and as such, just as there is no freedom of God in itself and as such. God's being is his being as the one who loves in freedom'.[14] As such, he argues that the choice to begin with the perfections of divine love is predicated on 'the intention and confidence that we begin in this way, even if indirectly, also with the divine freedom'.[15] Thus, despite treating divine freedom second in the order of the divine life, Barth makes clear that 'this order cannot mean a subordination. God's freedom is no less divine than his love'.[16] For Barth, not only is it true that God's freedom is divine specifically as 'the freedom in which God *loves*', but also that 'God's love is divine in the fact that it is his *free* love'.[17] As such, we must take God's freedom just as seriously as his love.[18]

4.2 Essential reality and self-determination: a unity-in-distinction

Nevertheless, positing the indissolubility of being and act does not in itself demonstrate the epistemological reliability of revelation. While we have shown that for Barth being and act are always united in God, we have also followed Hunsinger in arguing that Barth posits God's triunity as logically antecedent to election by identifying God's original being-in-act not with election but with triune relationality. This means that we have not yet provided an explanation for those passages of the *Church Dogmatics* which seem to present the divine being as the consequence of election. To make sense of the role of election without resorting to Hunsinger's eclectic interpretation, we must turn to Barth's understanding of the relationship between God's essential reality and self-determination, a relationship which I pro-

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13 Barth, *KD* II/1, 393.

14 Barth, *KD* II/1, 395. [‚Es gibt keine Liebe Gottes an sich und als solche, wie es auch keine Freiheit Gottes an sich und als solche gibt. Gottes Sein ist sein Sein als der Liebende in der Freiheit'.]

15 Barth, *KD* II/1, 395. [‚Darum beginnen wir mit den Vollkommenheiten der göttlichen Liebe: in der Absicht und Zuversicht, gerade so, wenn auch indirekt, auch mit der göttlichen Freiheit zu beginnen'.]

16 Barth, *KD* II/1, 496. [‚Eine Unterordnung kann diese Ordnung nicht bedeuten. Gottes Freiheit ist nicht weniger göttlich als seine Liebe'.]

17 Barth, *KD* II/1, 496. [‚Gottes Freiheit ist darin göttlich, daß sie die Freiheit ist, in der Gott *liebt*. Es gilt aber auch das Umgekehrte: Gottes Liebe ist darin göttlich, daß sie seine *freie* Liebe ist'.]

18 Barth, *KD* II/1, 496.

pose may be characterized (to use Hunsinger's phrase, though with slightly different force) as an "asymmetrical unity-in-distinction".

To make sense of this relationship, it is important to recognize that it is possible both to express and ground the same attributes in multiple ways (that is, in multiple acts). For example, to say that God is love means, for Barth, that God engages in the act of loving; however, God can engage in this act strictly *ad intra* (as love between the three persons of the Trinity) or *ad extra* (in fellowship with a reality distinct from himself). In each case, while the *being* of God as love remains the same, the *form* this being takes is distinct, and this is represented by a difference in the way God is *identified*. It is only, for example, in his love *ad extra* that God becomes the God of humanity and so identified as "God-for-us". For Barth, therefore, election means divine self-determination because it is the act in which God chooses the form his essential divine being will eternally take, and hence the way in which he may henceforth be identified.[19] Barth makes this function clear in *CD* II/2, where he describes election as 'the divine decision…in which God has given himself to another, to humanity, to his humanity, and on this basis God is the one who has willed and done this'.[20] That is, the determination is not God's *ability* to give himself (which corresponds to the divine being and is grounded in his triunity prior to this decision) but the fact that he actually does engage in this act.

Moreover, since we have shown that being and act are combined in Barth's ontology under the shared term "reality", it follows that, once God's love takes on the form of love *ad extra* in the decision of election, his being-in-act as love becomes not only his original intratrinitarian love but, without detracting in any way from it, also a second eternal being-in-act of love towards the creaturely other. This second eternal engagement in love *ad extra* is qualitatively indistinguishable as God's reality from the logically prior (and only in this sense more ultimate) eternal engagement in love *ad intra*.[21] It is for this reason that Barth can state that all authentic tenets of the Christian faith must reflect the divine election both in form and content. That is, because this self-determination, without changing the content of the divine being itself, has constituted God's ontological reality anew as the eternal being-in-act not

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19 While Hunsinger also understands the divine self-determination by distinguishing "being" from "mode of identity", his argument fails to show how the way in which God is identified nevertheless corresponds to God's essential reality in the way outlined below. Instead, he links self-determination to the addition of 'material determinations' in contradistinction to God's essential being, which, as noted above, undermines the ontological significance of the incarnation.

20 Barth, *KD* II/2, 55. [‚Der göttlichen Entscheidung…in welcher Gott sich selbst einem Anderen, eben dem Menschen, seinem Menschen, dahingegeben hat und auf Grund derer Gott nun eben der ist, der das gewollt und getan'.]

21 Note that this second eternal engagement in love *ad extra* is only *logically*, rather than *chronologically*, subsequent to his intratrinitarian love, meaning Barth's argument here does necessitate a temporal scheme of "before" and "after".

only between the Trinity but now also between the Trinity and creation. Likewise, Barth can assert that 'the doctrine of election belongs at the forefront of all other Christian tenets': not merely epistemologically, as the source of all knowledge of God, but also ontologically, since there is no reality of God in which he is not engaged in the eternal act of love towards the reality distinct from himself.[22]

Numerous examples can be found in the *Church Dogmatics* that express this relationship between the divine being and self-determination as a unity-in-distinction. Building from his characterization of the intratrinitarian divine life as a history, Barth describes the incarnation as God's decision to allow 'his own being, his *own* history' to 'now play out only as *world*-history'.[23] That is, God chooses for his being as the one who loves in freedom to take the form of the being-in-act of fellowship between himself and humanity. Similarly, Barth states that God's election of the man Jesus Christ in fellowship with himself means first and foremost that God decides 'to be who he is no longer without this other, but with him, in covenant with him',[24] again positing an antecedent reality of God which he subsequently determines to live out exclusively in fellowship with humanity.

Thus, while God's relation with humanity in Jesus Christ is undoubtedly a relation *ad extra*, for Barth 'it is a relation of God which is undertaken irrevocably, such that, after he willed to undertake it and has undertaken it, he would no longer be God without it; one in which he has determined himself such that this determination now belongs to him just as much as everything that he is in and for himself'.[25] While clearly distinguishing the self-determination of election from God's essential reality, this passage makes clear that the former is 'so assigned' to the latter that it is no less metaphysically definitive than his being *in se*. The decision does not *primally* constitute the divine being but gives it a new additional form, establishing the mode of divine identification disclosed in revelation. Since it is only by this new way of being identified (as "God-for-us") that we know God, without the human Jesus of Nazareth 'God would be another, an alien God. According to the Christian perception he would not be God at all'.[26] It is only by recognizing Barth's

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22 Barth, *KD* II/2, 82. [‚Weil dem so ist, darum gehört die Erwählungslehre an die Spitze aller anderen christlichen Sätze'.]

23 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 236. [‚Daß sein eigenes Sein, seine *eigene* Geschichte, sich nun abspielt als *Welt*geschichte'.]

24 Barth, *KD* II/2, 9. [‚Um nun nicht mehr ohne dieses Andere, sondern mit ihm, im Bunde mit ihm zu sein, der er ist'.]

25 Barth, *KD* II/2, 6. [‚Aber ein unwiderruflich eingenommenes Verhalten Gottes: ein solches, ohne das er, nachdem er es einnehmen wollte und eingenommen hat, nicht mehr Gott wäre, ein solches, in welchem er sich selber bestimmt hat, so daß diese Bestimmtheit nun ebenso zu ihm gehört wie Alles, was er an und für sich selber ist'.]

26 Barth, *KD* II/2, 5–6. [‚Gott ohne diesen Menschen und ohne dieses Volk wäre ein anderer, ein fremder Gott; er wäre nach christlicher Erkenntnis gar nicht Gott'.]

asymmetrical unity-in-distinction between the antecedent divine essential reality and subsequent self-determination, and hence between the concepts of "being" and "mode of identification", that we can make sense of this latter quote alongside the *Church Dogmatics*' repeated assertions that God's freedom in election is secured by the fact that he would be the very same God without it. Accordingly, Barth can state without contradiction that the decision to elect is both an act of free grace and the event in which 'God wills to be and is God'.[27]

On the basis of these conclusions, we are now in a position to explain those actualist source texts cited by McCormack. First, Barth's statement in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 that election is the 'event which constitutes the divine being'[28] can be understood alongside his repeated references to a metaphysical reality of God prior to election because the divine being is a being-in-act. This means that the act in which God eternally engages (in this case, election)[29] not only expresses the divine being but simultaneously grounds it: the divine being is both demonstrated by and consists 'in the fact that, because he is free in his love, he is capable of and willing to engage in this condescension'.[30] As such, Barth can go on to state that God 'is God in that he concerns himself with *this* creature', and 'he is God in the fact that he can give himself up and really does give himself up not only to the creaturely *obligation* but to the *hardship* of the human creature',[31] without precluding God's prior, self-sufficient metaphysical reality as the intratrinitarian relation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Second, we turn to Barth's assertion that christological revelation teaches us 'that the *forma Dei* consists precisely in the grace in which God himself assumes and makes his own the *forma servi*' (on the basis that Philippians 2 states that it is *because* the Son emptied and humbled himself that the title *Kyrios* is given to him).[32] Barth's meaning here is not that the divine being consists inherently in God assuming the form of the servant, but rather that God has chosen this as the way in which he is God, as the form of his being-in-act, and hence as his way of being identified. Accordingly, God is eternally engaged in the incarnation as the

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27 Barth, *KD* II/2, 7. [‚Diese Urgeschichte und also dieser Bund ist das Verhalten, in welchem Gott kraft der Entscheidung seiner freien Liebe Gott sein will und Gott ist'.] See also Barth, *KD* II/2, 52–53.

28 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 141. [‚Geschehen…, das das göttliche Sein ausmacht'.]

29 Another such act in which God eternally engages that both grounds and expresses the divine being is his act of triune relationality.

30 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 142. [‚Darin *besteht*, daß er, weil er der in seiner *Liebe* Freie ist, dieser Herablassung…fähig und dazu willig ist'.]

31 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 142. [‚So ist er Gott, daß er selbst sich gerade *dieses* Geschöpfs annimmt… *so* ist er Gott, daß er sich selbst nicht nur in die geschöpfliche *Bindung*, sondern in das *Elend* des menschlichen Geschöpfs begeben kann und wirklich begibt'.]

32 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 205. [‚Daß die forma Dei gerade in der Gnade besteht, in der Gott selbst die forma servi annimmt und sich zu eigen macht'.]

act that simultaneous both grounds and expresses his being as love, allowing us to say not only that the divine being is expressed in the incarnation but also that the incarnation constitutes the divine being (and is accordingly the act that makes God divine). Yet, we are also able to affirm that the Son was *Kyrios* prior to taking on the form of the servant (despite the subsequent use of the consecutive διὸ in v. 9), explaining how the incarnation can be an act of *kenosis* in the first place.

Third, Barth's statement in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 'God elects. It is this that absolutely precedes all other being and happening,'[33] is more difficult to explain due to Barth's claim that election precedes 'all other being'. Yet, when we consider that Barth is operating from a "successive" understanding of eternity (see chapter six, below), it is clear that "being" here refers to being-in-act extended over a duration in eternity. This interpretation is supported by Barth's juxtaposition of 'being' in this context with 'happening', suggesting a more dynamic use of the term than abstract essence *per se*. Thus, Barth's intention, here as elsewhere, is to express that, while God's being as Trinity is *logically* antecedent to election, this triunity has no concrete being-in-act prior to election that might constitute a *Deus absconditus* behind revelation.

It is useful to end this section by noting that Barth's characterization of the relationship between being and self-determination as a unity-in-distinction entails that God's self-determination is fundamentally a repetition of the divine being *in se*. Accordingly, Barth can affirm that the divine ontology that revelation discloses to us is truly that of God himself, undifferentiated from his essential reality prior to election with respect to quality or content. Further, he can assert that all God's willing *ad extra* in election is primarily an affirmation of his being-in-act *ad intra* as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, since God always wills in accordance with this being-in-act.[34] This point is illustrated succinctly in the characterization of election as 'an *opus Dei internum ad extra*',[35] reflecting the way it unfolds from within the triune life itself. As such, while God determines himself for humiliation in election, 'in so doing he does not need to become alien to himself, to change himself… He does not become another when in Jesus Christ he also becomes and is human'.[36]

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33 Barth, *KD* II/2, 107. [,*Gott wählt. Dies ist es, was allem anderen Sein und Geschehen schlechterdings vorangeht*'.]

34 Barth, *KD* II/2, 184.

35 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 70.

36 Barth, *KD* IV/2, 92. [,*Er hat es nicht nötig, sich selbst darin fremd zu werden, zu verändern… Er wird damit kein Anderer, daß er in Jesus Christus auch Mensch wird und ist*'.]

4.3   The divine being as reiterative and the reformulation of constancy as 'faithfulness'

Barth's divine ontology defines eternity in terms of acts – acts which happen once-and-for-all when considered from the standpoint of eternity but happen reiteratively at every moment when considered from the perspective of time. Accordingly, Barth speaks of divine constancy not in the traditional language of "immutability" but instead as "faithfulness", denoting God's unchanging commitment to his acts both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. While implied already in volume two of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth lays this out explicitly only in volume four, where he explains that although the act of election is complete insofar as it is eternal, as an act of God it 'does not cease thereby also to be a becoming'.[37] Accordingly, God's being as love 'is not to be understood as a being which is inert because of its sheer divinity, but as a being which is *supremely active* in an eternally new positing of itself'.[38] Consequently, his immutability is not 'a holy immobility and rigidity…but…the constancy of his faithfulness to himself constantly reaffirming itself in freedom'.[39]

This dimension of Barth's metaphysics is examined by the Barthian scholar Mark Edwards, who notes Barth's presentation of the triune life as God's 'continual self-willing of each "other" as Father, Son and Holy Spirit' in a '*repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate*'.[40] Edwards explains that, for Barth, 'God repeatedly wills and affirms and confirms Himself in and as this ongoing, never-ending, repetitive *koinonia* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a *koinonia* that is not only satisfied with itself but which also goes outward', seeking fellowship with the creaturely other.[41] It is the constancy with which the divine triunity is perpetually self-willed that underpins its eternal nature; that is, God is eternally triune because he is 'eternally faithful in himself and to himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.[42]

This characterization of the divine reality as a cycle of reiterative and faithful self-affirmation at every moment plays an important function in securing the reliability of revelation, since it identifies Jesus as the "basic principle" grounding the possibility of relationship between God and the world. In this understanding, divine freedom is 'a single work of one and the same wisdom' (namely the relationship

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37 Barth, *KD* IV/2, 49. [‚Das nicht aufhört, als solches auch ein Werden zu sein'.]

38 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 626. [‚Nicht etwa vor lauter Göttlichkeit als ein untätiges, sondern als das in ewig neuer Setzung seiner selbst *tätigste* Sein zu verstehen ist'.]

39 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 626. [‚Seine Unveränderlichkeit nicht als eine heilige Unbeweglichkeit und Starre, nicht als ein göttlicher Tod, sondern als die Beständigkeit seiner in Freiheit immer neu sich bestätigenden Treue zu sich selber'.]

40 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 94.

41 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 95.

42 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 96–98.

between God and Jesus) rather than the juxtaposition of incompatible elements.[43] Accordingly, all expressions of God's freedom can be understood 'as the unity of the freedom of his being', meaning that this freedom is not capricious but rather in all forms demonstrates God's faithfulness, providing reassurance that God is always for-us in the multiplicity of his divine actions.[44] Thus, Barth argues that we can be confident God is always the same God because God is Jesus Christ, and hence 'the divine immanence in all its possibilities and forms has its origin in Jesus Christ and therefore its unity in him'.[45] When Barth turns to treat the incarnation in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, therefore, he describes God's freedom in this act as faithfulness to his original decision of election. In other words, the Son's decision to become incarnate 'does not make just any use of the possibilities of his divine nature but rather one particular use which is necessary on the basis and in implementation of his own decision', for which reason 'it could not come about that something completely different happens.'[46]

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43 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357. [‚Ein einziges Werk einer und derselben Weisheit'.]

44 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357–358. [‚Die Einheit der Freiheit seines Wesens'.]

45 Barth, *KD* II/1, 358. [‚Gottes Immanenz in allen ihren Möglichkeiten und Gestalten in Jesus Christus ihren Ursprung und darum in ihm…die Einheit…hat'.]

46 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 212–213. [‚Er macht von den Möglichkeiten seiner göttlichen Natur nicht irgend einen, sondern einen bestimmten, den auf Grund und im Vollzug seiner eigenen Entscheidung notwendigen Gebrauch'.] [‚Es könnte sich nicht allenfalls auch etwas ganz Anderes ereignen'.]

5. Barth's Metaphysics II: Divine Freedom

5.1 Divine freedom in the act of revelation

In the foregoing chapter we began our examination of the metaphysics through which Barth underpins his doctrine of election, outlining how he develops an understanding of God as a being-in-act to demonstrate the ontological reliability of christological revelation. In the chapter's final section, we already began to see how the consequent dynamism of Barth's conception of the divine reality has direct implications for divine freedom via the reformulation of immutability into God's "faithfulness" to his acts at every moment. In this chapter we will expand on this insight to unpack how Barth balances his epistemological conclusions with an equal emphasis on divine freedom, and so presents his solution to the epistemology-freedom debate.

Divine freedom forms a major theme in the *Church Dogmatics*, with Barth arguing that 'Godhead' and 'Lordship' in the Bible mean nothing other than this freedom. As we explained in chapter two, the act of revelation in which God becomes event in history is a decision taken in freedom, and the disclosure of this fact forms the primary content of revelation itself. Thus, Barth's statement that the content of revelation is at all times that 'God reveals himself as Lord' means specifically that in revealing himself God shows that he is able to do so. Yet, since revelation means the self-unveiling of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled, the fact that he nevertheless unveils himself requires us to differentiate between God in his concealment (in which he cannot be unveiled) and 'God a second time in a very different way' (in which he *can* be unveiled). Accordingly, the lordship that forms the content of christological revelation consists specifically of 'the freedom of God to differentiate Himself from Himself', and hence his reality as Trinity.

It is essential for Barth, however, that divine freedom is inexhaustible and thus never expended by the exercise of it, meaning that God retains his freedom even in his self-unveiled form. This is because, when God reveals himself, he also simultaneously conceals himself, becoming hidden behind the creaturely form through which he makes himself indirectly objective to us. Accordingly, even in the form of the human Jesus of Nazareth in whom God most explicitly reveals himself, God retains his freedom, expressed in his complete agency regarding whether or not make himself manifest to those he encounters as divine rather than merely human. It is this fact that explains why only a few of Jesus' contemporaries received him as revelation and why even those few could deny, abandon and indeed betray him. In short, while God unveils himself, the unveiling does not become inherent to

his existence such that he loses his agency and thus freedom in revelation. Barth is therefore able to assert 'that [God's] revelation does not mean in the slightest a loss of his mystery, that he assumes a form but without any form containing him'.[1] As such, we may further refine Barth's statement that 'God reveals himself as the Lord' to mean that God reveals his *permanent* freedom both to unveil and to veil himself.[2]

This point can be explicated epistemologically. While God becomes the object of human knowledge, the fact that he remains the creator of the subject of this knowledge (viz., the human knower) means this human subject stands in relation to the divine object in 'a fundamentally and irrevocably determined sequence', which cannot be changed.[3] This means that human beings can in no sense claim to 'have control over [this object]' by imagining a precedence on the part of the human knower that would encapsulate God in the human mind like all other objects.[4] Rather, knowledge of God can only come from an act of divine grace and can only be fulfilled in our decision to be obedient to it. In this way, knowledge of God is a cycle beginning with 'a voluntary decision of God' to offer himself to humanity, which is 'received by faith' whereby the human 'yields and becomes submissive to the will of God'.[5] Barth notes that the Bible recognizes 'no knowledge of God outside this cycle' and thus outside God's prerogative to give himself to us as our object.[6]

Since God is only known by God, therefore, while we must obey God's command and so respond to his revelation with faith, none of the concepts we employ have any *inherent* ability to make God known. As such, true knowledge of God is possible solely because God adopts our conceptions and allows them to participate 'in the truth of God through God himself in grace'.[7] The distance between God and humanity is thus only bridged because God has decided to create 'fellowship between himself and us'; something which cannot be considered the actualization of a human capacity but only the miracle of the divine good-pleasure.[8] Accordingly, when we attain knowledge of God by faith, 'our looking, conceiving and speaking

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1 Barth, *KD* I/1, 341–342. [‚Daß seine Offenbarung nicht im geringsten ein Verlieren seines Geheimnisses bedeutet, daß er wohl Gestalt annimmt, aber ohne daß ihn doch irgendeine Gestalt fassen würde'.]

2 Barth, *KD* I/1, 342.

3 Barth, *KD* II/1, 21. [‚Eines grundsätzlichen unaufhebbar dazu bestimmten *Nachhers*'.]

4 Barth, *KD* II/1, 21. [‚Erkenntnis dieses Gegenstandes kann auf keinen Fall und in keinem Sinn eine Verfügung über ihn bedeuten'.]

5 Barth, *KD* II/1, 28–30. [‚Einer Willensentscheidung Gottes… Glauben findet… dem Willen Gottes weicht und fügsam wird'.]

6 Barth, *KD* II/1, 30. [‚Außerhalb dieses Kreislaufes gibt es nach der Bibel keine Erkenntnis Gottes'.]

7 Barth, *KD* II/1, 200. [‚*An der Wahrheit Gottes durch Gott selbst in Gnaden*'.]

8 Barth, *KD* II/1, 204. [‚Gemeinschaft zwischen sich und uns'.]

are placed in a service and put to a use for which they have, in and of themselves, no capacity either afterwards or beforehand'.[9] This point ensures that we do not encroach upon God's hiddenness by presuming to know him such that we thereby become masters of him.[10] Furthermore, just as we have no inherent capacity to view and conceive God, so too, there is no inherent necessity 'that God must and could be present as the object of our looking and conceiving'.[11] The fact that he is present nonetheless accordingly reveals only 'the exuberant freedom of the love in which he is who he is' and in no way any necessity imposed upon God *ad extra*.[12]

5.2   Counterfactual freedom and the content of revelation

This latter point demonstrates that God is not bound to human rationality regarding what he can or must do, and that it is an illusion to claim otherwise. Barth asserts that God is free over human standards of necessity and appropriateness, explaining that the believer cannot think 'God can be measured with the yard-stick of what he himself considers appropriate for God and beneficial for humans'.[13] Accordingly, he rejects theologies that begin by asking what is possible within God's freedom according to human rationality and use this as a lens through which to interpret God's freedom as it is manifested in the event of revelation. Rather, Barth argues that the correct theological 'conception of what is possible with God is based absolutely on [the] conception of what God has really willed and done, and not vice-versa'.[14]

As such, 'when we say that God "had to" be his own mediator and therefore become man, in order to become manifest to us, and that by so becoming he "was able" to become manifest to us', it is imperative that we know on what basis we make these assertions.[15] Barth emphasizes that they must not be understood to describe any antecedently discerned logical necessity, whether external or internal

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9 Barth, *KD* II/1, 218. [‚Unser Anschauen, Begreifen und Reden wird dann vielmehr in einen *Dienst* gestellt und in einen *Gebrauch* genommen, zu dem es die *Fähigkeit* aus sich selber und in sich selber nach wie vor *nicht* hat'.]

10 Barth, *KD* II/1, 218.

11 Barth, *KD* II/1, 231–232. [‚Daß Gott zur Stelle sein müßte und könnte als Gegenstand unseres Anschauens und Begreifens'.]

12 Barth, *KD* II/1, 232. [‚Die überschwängliche Freiheit der Liebe, in der er ist, der er ist'.]

13 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 4. [‚Er würde weder Gott mit dem Maßstab dessen, was er selbst für Gott angemessen und dem Menschen heilsam hält, messen zu können meinen'.]

14 Barth, *KD* I/2, 8. [‚Darum richtet sich ihr Begriff von dem, was bei Gott möglich ist, schlechterdings nach ihrem Begriff von dem, was Gott wirklich gewollt und getan hat und nicht umgekehrt'.]

15 Barth, *KD* I/2, 36. [‚Gott „mußte" sein eigener Mittler und also Mensch werden, um uns offenbar zu werden und: indem er das wurde, „konnte" er uns offenbar werden'.]

to God, that compelled God to act in a particular way. Rather, language of 'had to' and 'was able' may be employed solely *a posteriori*, on the basis of revelation, as a means of reflecting the fact that the content of revelation could not be otherwise than it is. The reason it could not be otherwise is simply that God is the God disclosed in revelation; hence, if revelation were to have a different content, this would correspond to a different God than actually exists.[16]

Barth seeks to demonstrates the validity of this approach by appeal to Hebrews 2:10, 17, which speaks of the incarnation as 'fitting' and of the Son being 'obliged' to take flesh. In this example, the reality of Jesus Christ tells us that 'God is free for us' in that he can reveal himself by his Son – not the Father or the Holy Spirit – becoming human.[17] Despite this fact, however, Barth argues that we cannot 'assert that God absolutely could not become manifest to us except in this way', since this would again be to place logical restrictions on the divine freedom.[18] As such, he argues that we should speak here not of absolute necessity but more accurately of 'appropriation'.[19] Nevertheless, while Barth thus grants that, absolutely speaking, the Father or the Spirit could also have assumed flesh, he makes clear that such absolute speaking has no place in theological discourse.[20]

In the same way, when we say that God was able and had to reveal himself in the form of a human rather than in some other form, we do so 'only in thankful retrospect on what God has really done' and not on the basis of any rationally discerned 'affinity and aptitude for God's revelation' to which he is bound.[21] Such statements make no judgement as to what is necessary for God 'but only an acknowledgement of what he obviously considered necessary'.[22] This distinction leaves open the possibility that God, strictly speaking, had the ability to reveal himself in other ways, while honouring 'the factual will of God as it is visible in the event of his revelation'.[23] What results is a dynamic equilibrium in which counterfactual possibility and necessity are both given their due.

We can see how this dynamic equilibrium plays out by comparing Barth and Thomas Aquinas' attitudes towards the counterfactual of God effecting salvation in a way other than by the incarnation of the Son. While both agree on the negative

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16 Barth, *KD* I/2, 36.

17 Barth, *KD* I/2, 36. [‚Gott ist…frei für uns'.]

18 Barth, *KD* I/2, 38. [‚Daß Gott uns absolut nicht anders als gerade so offenbar werden konnte'.]

19 Barth, *KD* I/2, 39. [‚„Appropriation"'.]

20 Barth, *KD* I/2, 39.

21 Barth, *KD* I/2, 41. [‚Nur im dankbaren Rückblick auf das, was Gott wirklich getan hat'.] [‚Affinität und Eignung für Gottes Offenbarung'.]

22 Barth, *KD* I/2, 41. [‚Was Gottes würdig ist'.] [‚Sondern nur eine Anerkennung dessen, was er offenbar für notwendig gehalten hat'.]

23 Barth, *KD* I/2, 41. [‚Den faktischen Willen Gottes, wie er im Ereignis seiner Offenbarung sichtbar ist'.]

affirmation that it was not strictly necessary that the Son became flesh, Barth rejects Aquinas' positive corollary affirmation that, if the Son had not become incarnate, God would have preordained humanity's salvation by another means.[24] Instead, Barth affirms the necessity that Jesus Christ is the electing God, since it is 'only if Jesus Christ is the real, and incontestably real, basis of our election' that he can be 'the basis of our knowledge of election' according to his identification as the elect human in whom humanity is elect, and hence that we can 'have a certainty of our own election'.[25] While Barth thus refuses to deny counterfactual possibilities regarding alternative salvation histories, he does rule out making any positive statements about such counterfactuals as though these constituted a selection of alternative possibilities out of which God chose the reality he ultimately actualized. To do so would be to diminish the value of revelation as merely one particular mode of salvation, and thus to relativize the doctrine of God derived from it as likewise just one possible divine reality.

Regarding the counterfactual of God refraining from a given work *ad extra*, however, Barth expresses his affirmation more robustly and, moreover, repeatedly makes positive statements concerning the nature of God in such a circumstance (viz., that he would be just the same as he in fact is). For example, Barth refers at multiple points in the *Church Dogmatics* to the counterfactual of the Logos not having become incarnate to demonstrate that he became human as an expression of 'his free, gracious will'.[26] Barth recognizes the need to affirm this particular type of counterfactual in order to secure the gracious nature of the divine works. Nevertheless, the dynamic equilibrium reasserts itself when Barth turns to the implications of such assertions. Thus, insofar as allowing a counterfactual regarding the incarnation for the sake of divine freedom presupposes the existence of a Logos *asarkos* ontologically prior to the decision of election, Barth accepts this concept. However, he also makes clear that we cannot go behind God's actual decision to become incarnate to speak about this Logos *asarkos* beyond the bare affirmation of his reality. Accordingly, while Barth maintains the ability to state that God did not need to become incarnate, he argues that real faith does not concern itself with

24 Barth, *KD* II/2, 128. See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas: Part 3 QQ I–XXVI*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1920), III. 24. 2 ad 3.

25 Barth, *KD* II/2, 128. [‚Nur wenn Jesus Christus auch der Realgrund und zwar der von nirgendswoher in Frage zu stellende Realgrund unserer Erwählung ist, kann er laut des zweiten Satzes auch ihr Erkenntnisgrund sein, gibt es also eine Gewißheit unserer eigenen Erwählung'.]

26 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 55. [‚Seinen freien, gnädigen Willen'.]

a 'regress to a pre-temporal being of the Word of God that is not his being in the flesh', thereby precluding the threat of a *Deus absconditus*.[27]

5.3 Divine freedom in creation and salvation

As mentioned in chapter two, Barth's argument for the reliability of christological revelation relies heavily on an *analogia temporalis*, according to which God's temporal works *ad extra* reflect logically and metaphysically prior eternal acts *ad intra*. In this section we will demonstrate in greater detail how this principle is used to secure the freedom of the divine works of creation and salvation. The overarching argument employed by Barth is that the divine being-in-act is already constituted in the internal act of triune relationality and merely repeated in a new, temporal way *ad extra* in God's loving fellowship with creation.[28] Accordingly, while God 'stands in a definite relationship *ad extra* to another', Barth denies both that this relationship 'forms a part of the reality of God' and that 'God is compelled into this relationship [or] is bound, forced or urged by this other'.[29] Any such compulsion from without is precluded by the fact that, 'even without that relationship', God would be the very same.[30]

Since Barth's use of the *analogia temporalis* has been introduced earlier, it shall suffice here to reiterate two of his most prominent examples of this analogy: the divine nature as love and the presence of otherness in God. Taking the first, Barth explains that while we know that God is loving because he 'seeks and creates fellowship' with us in the act of revelation, this disclosure reflects the fact that God would still be loving without us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[31] As such, the divine love *ad extra* is shown to be gracious because it does not serve any divine self-actualization that would infringe upon the absolutely free nature of this act. God loves us and the world, but does so 'as he who would be the one who loves even without us, even without the world; as he who therefore needs no other to form the prior ground of his existence as the one who loves and therefore as God'.[32]

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27 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 55. [‚Mit dem Regreß auf ein vorzeitliches Sein des Wortes Gottes, das nicht sein Sein im Fleische'.]

28 Barth, *KD* II/1, 301, 303–304.

29 Barth, *KD* II/2, 4. [‚In einer bestimmten Beziehung nach außen, zu einem Anderen steht… Einen Teil seiner Wirklichkeit bildete… Nicht als ob Gott also zu dieser Beziehung genötigt, durch dieses Andere gebunden, gezwungen und gedrungen wäre'.]

30 Barth, *KD* II/2, 4. [‚Auch ohne jene Beziehung'.]

31 Barth, *KD* II/1, 288. [‚*sucht und schafft Gemeinschaft*'.]

32 Barth, *KD* II/1, 314–315. [‚Als der, der der Liebende wäre auch ohne uns, auch ohne die Welt, als der also, der keines Anderen bedarf, um erst auf Grund von dessen Existenz der Liebende und also Gott zu sein'.]

This point is significant since Barth notes that it is only because God's love is free that it can be loving at all.[33]

Secondly, with regards to divine otherness, Barth observes that God does not need the world for there to be otherness in him because, 'before all worlds, in his Son he has otherness in himself from eternity and in eternity'.[34] Since God does not need co-existence with the creature not to be alone, his willing of the creature is not necessary but free and gracious. This is because 'everything that the creature seemingly has to offer him – its otherness and therefore its being in antithesis to him and therefore his own existence in co-existence – he has it all even without the creature *in himself*'.[35] It follows that, primarily and originally, it is not creation which is 'the other, the counterpart of God, that which co-exists with God' but God's own intratrinitarian relations.[36]

5.4 The positive meaning of freedom as "self-determination"

As the preceding discourse demonstrates, when we allow revelation to tell us what divine freedom means, the negative sense that has historically dominated our understanding of this attribute (that is, freedom as a lack of restriction) is revealed to be only the 'improper side' of freedom.[37] What emerges instead is the characterization of divine freedom as the fact that God's lordship 'is absolutely God's *own*, in no sense forced upon him from outside, by no higher necessity than that of his own choosing'.[38] On the basis of revelation, therefore, freedom takes on the positive sense of being 'grounded by and in in oneself, determined and moved by oneself'.[39] For Barth, the loss of this positive understanding of freedom in the course of the church's history can be pinpointed to the displacement of the doctrine of the *aseitas Dei* by the term *independentia*. While Barth does not dismiss the theological

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33 Barth, *KD* II/2, 8–9.

34 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357. [‚Er hat vor aller Welt auch die Andersheit in seinem Sohne von Ewigkeit und in Ewigkeit in sich selber‘.]

35 Barth, IV/1, 220. [‚Alles, was die Kreatur ihm scheinbar zu bieten hat: ihr Anderssein und also ihr Sein im Gegenüber zu ihm und also seine eigene Existenz als Koexistenz – das Alles hat er auch ohne sie *in sich selber*‘.]

36 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 220. [‚Der Andere, Gottes Gegenüber, der mit Gott Koexistierende‘.]

37 Barth, *KD* II/1, 339. [‚Uneigentliche Seite‘.]

38 Barth, *KD* II/1, 338–339. [‚Es schlechterdings Gottes *eigenes*, in keiner Weise von außen ihm aufgedrängtes, durch keine höhere Notwendigkeit als die seines eigenen Wählens‘.]

39 Barth, *KD* II/1, 339. [‚Durch sich selbst und in sich selbst begründet, durch sich selbst bestimmt und bewegt sein‘.]

importance of freedom's negative aspect, he emphasizes that it must not become the dominant way of understanding God's freedom.[40]

Barth thus proposes that the negative aspect be understood only against the backdrop of the positive. While Scripture acknowledges that God's transcendence means that he is free from external conditioning, it chiefly identifies transcendence in the fact that God enters into communion with creation 'without sacrificing his distinction and freedom, but in fact in the very exercise of them'.[41] For Barth, therefore, it is crucial that God's freedom does not paradoxically become a prison for God, limiting the possibility of his relationship with creation to a lack of external conditioning. Rather, God's freedom must mean not only that he is unconditioned but also that he can be conditioned, according to his prerogative.[42]

This reformulation of divine freedom reflects once again the recognition that no attribute of God can be understood except on the basis of revelation. Since the existence of Jesus Christ means that God became and is also human, we have to understand divine freedom in terms of this event, leading Barth to argue that the event of the incarnation *is* the divine freedom.[43] By extension, since the incarnation reveals God as 'living and loving', we must understand divine freedom specifically as 'the freedom of the divine *living* and *loving*'.[44] In this way, God's freedom denotes nothing more or less than the unique manner of God's love: that it is 'utterly free, grounded in itself, needing no other, and yet also not lacking another, but a self-giving love which is sovereignly turned towards the other'.[45] In short, God's freedom is always understood within the parameters of love (to establish that this love is free) just as God's love is always understood within the parameters of freedom (since it is only because the love is free that it is able to be loving).[46]

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40 Barth, *KD* II/1, 339.

41 Barth, *KD* II/1, 340–341. [‚In dieser seiner Verschiedenheit und Freiheit, ohne sie aufzugeben, ja gerade indem er sie betätigt'.]

42 Barth, *KD* II/1, 341–342.

43 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 141.

44 Barth, *KD* II/1, 361. [‚Leben und Lieben… die Freiheit des göttlichen *Lebens* und *Liebens*'.]

45 Barth, *KD* II/1, 361. [‚Das freie, in sich selbst begründete, keines Anderen bedürftige und nun doch auch eines Anderen nicht entbehrende, sondern einem Anderen souverän zugewendete und sich schenkende Lieben'.]

46 Barth, *KD* II/1, 319.

5.5   God as "the one who loves in freedom"

Barth concludes that God's freedom is not an absolute freedom indistinguishable from caprice but rather a freedom to act in accordance with his nature. Yet, while God's essential being-in-act as the one who loves in freedom is primal to him, the form that this takes is freely self-determined, meaning that the act in relation to the world by which it is manifested is solely the consequence of election. Bearing this in mind, Barth argues that God is free 'to differentiate His presence infinitely' not only *ad extra* but also *in se* based on his intention regarding the creature.[47] This reference to God determining himself "*in se*" by his relationship *ad extra* might seem to contradict the distinction established in chapter four between the divine being and mode of identification. However, when we remember that, in his relationship *ad extra*, God is actually determining his reality as this particular being-in-act, we can see that God's freedom in electing also determines God *in se*, despite the fact that it is only the way in which he is identified, and not his actual being, that is subject to change.

For Barth, therefore, while God's freedom can express itself in an infinite range of forms, all these forms have a fundamental unity as 'a single work of one and the same wisdom', rather than being the juxtaposition of incompatible elements.[48] This is because 'everything *for which* God is free and everything *in which* God is free' is unified by his being.[49] God is the one who loves in freedom, and all his acts express this essential being-in-act. Therefore, divine freedom does not mean that God engages in capricious (and hence incongruous) acts, but that God at every moment of time reaffirms the same divine being in a multitude of ways, all of which reflect the one essential being that is primal to God and the self-determined identification God chose in election. As such, Barth can state that God's freedom 'consists in His Son Jesus Christ and it is in Him that God has exercised it. In all its possibilities and forms it remains this one freedom that consists and is exercised in Jesus Christ'.[50]

Standing behind this assertion is the fact that, in his act of electing, God has chosen a new form for his essential being, corresponding to a new identification as "God-for-us" and hence Jesus Christ. Everything God does in his works of creating and sustaining fellowship with creation is the outworking of this one free decision. Accordingly, God's freedom to actualize this decision by becoming incarnate, and thus his ability to become lowly and hidden as well as exalted and glorified, 'is not

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47 Barth, *KD* II/1, 354–355. [,Seine Gegenwart…ins Unendliche zu differenzieren'.]

48 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357. [,Ein einziges Werk einer und derselben Weisheit'.]

49 Barth, *KD* II/1, 357. [,Alles, *wozu* Gott frei und Alles, *worin* Gott frei ist'.]

50 Barth, *KD* II/1, 360. [,Sie besteht aber in Gott in seinem Sohne Jesus Christus und eben in ihm hat er sie auch betätigt. Sie ist in allen ihren Möglichkeiten und Gestalten diese eine in Jesus Christus bestehende und betätigte Freiheit'.]

an arbitrary ability. It is not a vacuous capability to be one way or another'.[51] To repeat the quote with which we ended chapter four, '[God] does not make just any use of the possibilities of his divine nature but rather one particular use which is necessary on the basis and in implementation of his own decision'.

It is notable that Barth here speaks of the 'necessary' fulfilment of God's decision, and, moreover, claims that, under the concept of election, 'in freedom (not by losing it but by exercising it!) God has tied himself to the world'.[52] Nevertheless, as the parenthesis in the latter quote suggests, Barth maintains that God's election in time should not be understood 'in the sense that God is captured and bound by it, that he is bound by his decision as such or that by a first step on his way he is bound to take a corresponding second, or by the second bound to take a third'.[53] He thus argues that God remains free and continues to make use of his freedom, meaning God's eternal decision of predestination involves 'new decisions in time'.[54] We may summarize that, for Barth, God is always 'consistent…with the prearranged order of election and rejection', maintaining this order in principle such that salvation history will always have the structure disclosed in Christ, with the parousia and eschaton as the ultimate goal.[55] However, since God is 'at the same time always the living God…twists and alternations will therefore always be possible and real within [his life]'.[56] As such, the path this order takes in time (God's continued activity in the world) always remains unpredictable rather than being a "mechanical" unfolding.

Barth extends this same argument to the reiterative reaffirmation of God's triunity, or 'trinitarian repetitions'.[57] For Barth, these repetitions are the product of the divine free will, meaning that God is free even to will himself.[58] As such, he asserts that there is 'no higher or external necessity upon God forcing or constraining him to repeatedly be Trinitarian'; rather, the perpetual willing of his triunity at each

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51 Barth, *KD* IV/1, 212. [‚Ist kein arbiträres Können. Sie ist kein leeres Vermögen, so oder auch anders zu sein‘.]

52 Barth, *KD* II/2, 169. [‚Daß Gott sich in *Freiheit* (nicht indem er sie verlor, sondern indem er sie betätigte!) an die Welt gebunden hat‘.]

53 Barth, *KD* II/2, 205. [‚Aber das Alles nun eben nicht so, daß Gott dadurch gefangen und gebunden würde, nicht so, daß er durch seinen Beschluß als solchen oder durch einen ersten Schritt auf seinem Weg gebunden wäre, einen entsprechenden zweiten, oder durch den zweiten gebunden, einen dritten zu tun‘.]

54 Barth, *KD* II/2, 205. [‚In der Zeit…neuen Entscheidungen‘.]

55 Barth, *KD* II/2, 205. [‚Immer bleibt er sich selbst gleich, immer ja auch jene vorhin besprochene Ordnung des Erwählens und Verwerfens‘.]

56 Barth, *KD* II/2, 205. [‚Aber immer ist Gott auch der lebendige Gott…immer werden also innerhalb dieser Ordnung [sein Leben] Wendungen und Veränderungen möglich sein und wirklich werden‘.]

57 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 96. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics* I/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1975), 351.

58 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 96. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 591.

moment is always 'a free and faithful upholding of his own determination to do so'.[59] As noted above, this perpetual self-determination 'gives God a certain "mobility and elasticity"',[60] since it means his being can take on one of an infinite number of different forms at each new moment. In this way, God's eternal constancy does not mean 'the loss of God's dynamic freedom…because he is always free to manifest himself in a new triune moment'.[61]

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59 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 96.

60 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 104–105. See Barth *CD* II/2, 496; cf. p. 29–30 above.

61 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 122–123.

6.   Barth's Metaphysics III: Doctrine of Eternity

6.1   The incarnation as the basis for the doctrine of eternity

We have now examined both facets of Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate; however, if we wish to assess Barth's argument, it remains to investigate the doctrine of eternity within which it is framed. That is, if Barth employs the *analogia temporalis* to assert that temporal revelation acts as a signpost to God's eternal triune reality and his eternal election of Jesus Christ, the meaning of this claim can only be understood by elucidating Barth's use of the term "eternal". It is for this reason that we have already encountered Barth's relation to time at multiple points in this book – most notably in the final section of the last chapter on the divine life as a process of reiterative self-willing at every moment. We shall therefore end our discussion of Barth's metaphysics by turning our attention to this doctrine.

As with all God's attributes, Barth argues that divine eternity can only be understood on the basis of the incarnation, which he understands to comprise a 'real *fellowship* between God and creation, and thus between eternity and time'.[1] In this fellowship, Barth argues eternity became time without ceasing to be eternal; that is, God took time into himself and submitted to it, allowing it to become the form of his eternity. Significantly, this demonstrates that it is not the case that eternity must be opposed to time and kept at a distance from it; rather, the incarnation shows that eternity has the power to become temporal without contradicting itself. For this reason, Barth asserts that the incarnation and indeed the very name "Jesus Christ" is a refutation of the claim that eternity is simply timelessness, as he understands the classical tradition to argue (we shall dispute this claim in chapter ten, below).[2]

Barth's reasoning is that God's revelation as Jesus Christ is true to who God is in himself; hence we can be assured that God himself really has – and is – time for us, and therefore that eternity must include time. However, the conviction that christological revelation is true and reliable leads Barth to argue, further, that the temporal form of eternity revealed in Christ cannot merely reflect a form eternity takes *by virtue of this event* but must rather reflect the form of eternity *in se*. As such, Barth applies the *analogia temporalis* to argue that, if in Christ God makes time the form of his eternity, then God's eternity must have some form of temporality *in se*. Following the methodology outlined in chapter two, Barth consolidates the

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1 Barth, *KD* II/1, 694. [‚Wirklichen *Gemeinschaft* zwischen Gott und Kreatur, und also zwischen Ewigkeit und Zeit'.]

2 Barth, *KD* II/1, 694–695.

reliability of revelation by subsequently identifying this eternal analogue to time as the ground of its revealed form. As such, he argues that eternity's temporality is God's "readiness for time" and thus the basis of the form-in-time by which eternity manifests itself in revelation.[3]

On this basis, Barth asserts that '[God] does not change in giving Himself. He simply activates and reveals Himself *ad extra*, in the world. He is in and for the world what He is in and for Himself. *He is in time what He is in eternity*'.[4] Barth turns to explore this theme in *Church Dogmatics* III/2, §47.1, 'Jesus, Lord of Time', which consists of an analysis of Jesus' revelation in the forty days from Easter to ascension. Barth considers these forty days to be a window into eternity: the point where eternity's temporality maps onto earthly time, and thus the hermeneutical lens through which to understand not only Jesus' life *in time* but also the *eternal triune life*.[5]

6.2 God's time for us: revelation and the time of Jesus Christ

Barth's commences his discussion of Jesus' eternity-in-time by noting that revelation is an event and hence presupposes a time proper to it in which it occurs. As such, to say that 'God has time for us' in Christ means specifically that he has a special type of "revelation-time".[6] Barth considers this revelation-time to be a distinct mode of temporality, which comes about as a result of God becoming temporal and revealing himself. As such, it must be distinguished both from our current, fallen time and from the original time given to us by God that is now withdrawn from us. Thus, while we must understand revelation as an event that takes place in fallen time, it also has its own time, which is fulfilled and real.[7] This is because God becomes temporal in a way appropriate to his nature, namely, 'in unity and in correspondence with his eternity'.[8]

This fulfilled and real time is characterized by the presence of tenses, but – in direct contrast to the tenses of creaturely time – in such a way that it is not dictated or conditioned by them. For Jesus, the present does not have the fleeting character of a constantly moving boundary between past and future with no real existence. The past is not lost but is 'present in the present'; likewise, the future is not just

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3 Barth, *KD* II/1, 690.

4 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 216–218. See Barth, *CD* IV/1, 204.

5 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 208–211.

6 Barth, *KD* I/2, 52. [‚Wenn also Gott Zeit für uns hat'.]

7 Barth, *KD* I/2, 52, 54–55.

8 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 625. [‚In der Einheit und in Entsprechung zu seiner Ewigkeit'.]

that which is not yet 'but being which is fulfilled in itself and therefore fulfils the present and past'.[9] Further, while other times begin, endure and end, and are thus either future, contemporary or past, this limitation does not apply to the time of Jesus. First, while the life of Jesus has a beginning and was once future, 'this does *not* mean that it did *not yet* exist'.[10] Second, while the life of Jesus has duration and was once contemporary, 'this does *not* mean that it was present *only* in its duration and only from the standpoint of its contemporaries'.[11] Third, while the life of Jesus comes to an end and therefore became past, 'this does not mean that it then ceased to exist'.[12]

Barth turns to analyse these three points in detail. His argument is that all of time should be conceived in relation to the time of Jesus, since time is created as a result of God's primordial decision of election, as the decision for the incarnation and thus as a derivation of the revelation time of Jesus. This means that, strictly speaking, the ontologically "original" time is the time of Jesus, which God makes his own; hence created time temporally prior or posterior to it must be seen, respectively, to anticipate and reflect Jesus' coming. Accordingly, Barth argues that Jesus existed before his earthly existence because all of time 'hastened towards *his* future' and thus may be said also to be 'the time of his being'.[13] Likewise, the time after Jesus' earthly present was past is still his time since it is the time which derives from him and because it is the time of his renewed presence, anticipating his second coming. Finally, Barth argues that the time of Jesus' historical present reaches back to when his time was still future and forward to when his time will be past such that this time of Jesus' present 'is also the time before and the time after his time'.[14] In this way, the metaphysical priority of Jesus' time is a function of his existence prior to and following his incarnation as the Logos *incarnandus* and ascended Christ, respectively. The time of Jesus' historical existence links these two times because Jesus is just the same in history as he is before and after.

This all means that, when God takes on time in the incarnation, he does not lower or truncate himself to fit within it, but rather masters it, re-creates it and 'heals its wounds' – namely the fleeting nature of the present and the separation and conflict between the past, present and future – such that it acquires the character

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9 Barth, *KD* III/2, 626. [,In der Gegenwart mitgegenwärtiges… Sondern wiederum das in sich selbst erfüllte und darum schon die Gegenwart, ja schon die Vergangenheit erfüllendes Sein'.] Barth, *KD* I/2, 57–58.

10 Barth, *KD* III/2, 556. [,Das besagt aber *nicht*, daß sie damals *noch nicht* war'.]

11 Barth, *KD* III/2, 556. [,Das besagt aber *nicht*, daß sie *nur* in dieser seiner Dauer und nur vom Standpunkt der gleichzeitig dauernden anderen lebenden Wesen her gesehen gegenwärtig war'.]

12 Barth, *KD* III/2, 557. [,Das besagt aber nicht, daß sie einmal nicht mehr war'.]

13 Barth, *KD* III/2, 557. [,Weil sie *seiner* Zukunft entgegeneilte… Die Zeit seines Gewesenseins'.]

14 Barth, *KD* III/2, 557. [,Auch die Zeit vor und die Zeit nach seiner Zeit'.]

of eternity.[15] Yet, in order to do this, God must be both timeless and temporal: he must be temporal to the extent that he can take created time to himself, but he must be timeless to the extent that the defects of our time are alien to him and thus able to be healed by him.[16] As such, Barth argues that Jesus' time verifies the reality of the temporal distinctions of past, present and future while, at the same time, showing that Jesus is not limited by these distinctions.[17]

6.3   The nature of eternity: *stare* and *fluere*

Reflecting the quality of Jesus' *Lebenszeit*, Barth argues that eternity should be understood as duration containing beginning, succession and end, and indeed that eternity is the ground of the being, succession and end found in created time. However, he argues that eternity is not possessed, qualified or dominated by these temporal distinctions, instead possessing them in a unified and perfect way.[18] In divine eternity, therefore, past, present and future 'are in one another, not after one another' (that is, simultaneous, not successive),[19] and the tenses find their ultimate reality in the *simul* of eternity. This means that eternity 'lacks the fleetingness of the present, the separation of the before and after'.[20] Nevertheless, Barth makes clear that there is an indissoluble order to eternity: 'eternity is not just a simultaneous presence to time, but a simultaneity to the order that is innate within time: 'beginning, middle and end' is sequential and God is present to these three as one'. In this way, Barth understands eternity as 'pure duration'.[21]

Barth supports this interpretation by noting that the Bible is predominantly concerned with the positive sense of eternity and scarcely with its secondary quality as non-temporality, which he argues has come to dominate theological metaphysics. Barth highlights, for example, that both the Old and New Testament terms used for eternity, '*olam* and αἰών respectively, denote a space of time fixed by God, and that beginning, succession and end are frequently ascribed to God, with the biblical writers happily speaking of God's days or years.[22] Barth further observes that, 'whenever Holy Scripture calls God eternal, it emphasizes his freedom', explaining

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15 Barth, *KD* II/1, 696.

16 Barth, *KD* II/1, 696.

17 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 219–220.

18 Barth, *KD* II/1, 687–688.

19 Barth, *KD* III/2, 525. [,Ineinander, nicht nacheinander'.]

20 Barth, *KD* II/1, 690–691. [,Ihr fehlt nur die Flüchtigkeit der Gegenwart, das Auseinander des Vorher und Nachher'.]

21 Greggs, 'Order and Movement of Eternity', 7–8.

22 Barth, *KD* II/1, 688.

that God is free to be constant specifically because 'time has no power over him'.[23] In this way, Barth argues that it is God's quality as eternal that allows him to be true to himself such that we can have faith in him.

Barth sees this positive dimension of eternity expressed in Boethius' definition, which became archetypal in the Middle Ages: '*Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae total simul et perfecta possessio*'.[24] However, Barth claims that, despite being constantly quoted, this definition was never properly understood. For Barth, the definition precludes the contrast between the *nunc stans* and *nunc fluens* of time which he sees as ubiquitous to the classical interpretation of eternity; hence God's eternity is not related to our time like *stare* is to *fluere*: distinguishing 'a static and persisting present' from 'our flowing, and fleeting present'.[25] While eternity is undoubtedly a *nunc stans*, the fact that this *nunc* does not exclude a time prior to and after it (the past and future) shows that it also cannot exclude a *fluere*; rather it must include the *fluere* no less than the *stare*. This is essentially the very point made above, namely that, while eternity is not *subject* to the distinctions between past, present and future, it does not abolish these distinctions. For Barth, God's '*stare* is also a *fluere*, [but] without the inconstancy inherent to all creaturely *fluere*'.[26] Likewise, 'his *fluere* is also a *stare*, [but] without the immutability inherent to all creaturely *stare*'.[27]

This explains how Barth can describe God as 'supremely temporal'[28] and 'complete temporality',[29] while at the same time claiming that 'time can have nothing to do with God'.[30] That is, God is temporal insofar as his eternity has the beginning, succession and end that characterizes time; however, he is not temporal insofar as eternity is not possessed, dominated and separated by these distinctions as by a foreign principle of being.[31]

To convince us of his doctrine of eternity, Barth needs to show how it fulfils the two criteria on the basis of which this doctrine was originally conceived: to present the mode of life of a God who is both supremely simple and supremely immutable

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23 Barth, *KD* II/1, 687. [‚Immer wenn die heilige Schrift Gott *ewig* nennt, betont sie seine Freiheit'.] [‚Weil die Zeit keine Macht über ihn…hat'.]

24 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in *Boethius: Theological Tractates / The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. H. F. Stewart & E. K. Rand (London: Heinemann, 1968), Book V, 401.

25 Barth, *KD* II/1, 688–689. [‚Unserer, der in der Tat fließenden, flüchtigen…Gegenwart… Eine still-stehende und beharrende Gegenwart'.]

26 Barth, *KD* II/1, 689. [‚Sein stare ist auch ein fluere: ohne die Unständigkeit, die allem geschöpflichen fluere…ist'.]

27 Barth, *KD* II/1, 689. [‚Sein fluere ist aber auch ein stare: ohne die Unbeweglichkeit, die allem geschöpflichen stare…ist'.]

28 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 67–68. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 614.

29 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 67–68. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 620.

30 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 67–68. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 608.

31 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 67–68. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 610.

(see chapter ten, below). Since Barth rejects the doctrine of eternity derived from the classical interpretation of these two divine attributes, to fulfil the criteria he must instead reformulate the meanings of simplicity and immutability such that they can conform to his understanding of God's relationship to time. However, in so doing, Barth must also reformulate the philosophical presuppositions underpinning their classical interpretations. According to the Aristotelian metaphysical framework of the classical tradition, all being exists in a state of either *potentia* or *actus*. Individual substances are typically combinations of both *potentia* and *actus*, meaning they are composite; however, the assertion that God is simple necessitates that he be *actus purus*. Since Aristotle defines all change as the process by which *potentia* becomes *actus*, however, if God is *actus purus*, he cannot change in any way, meaning he is supremely immutable (this concept of *actus purus* will be examined in greater depth in chapter nine, below).

While Barth accepts the first inference (viz., that God must be *actus purus* by virtue of divine simplicity), he rejects the second (that God therefore cannot change) because he does not agree that all changes actualize *potentia* and thus presuppose the latter. Rather, he argues that it is possible to change and thus engage in different actions while possessing the same *actus* and so identity; in short, while remaining fundamentally the same. For Barth, God's identity is his being-in-act as "the one who loves in freedom"; hence his *actus* remains the same in every change because the various actions in which he engages are always the actions of free love and loving freedom. It is for this reason that Barth states that God's freedom is always to do what is natural within his being, since he is always the same, as *actus purus*. Thus, as we outlined in chapter four, Barth reformulates divine immutability from the rejection of all divine change to the assertion that God always retains a constant identity (viz., the one who loves in freedom) in every change he undertakes.

Turning to divine simplicity, Barth notes that this concept was originally defined in terms of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. That is, simplicity denoted 'the unity of the triune God [and] the unity of the Son of God with the human in Jesus Christ'.[32] He contrasts this with the theology of the later church, under theologians such as Augustine and Anselm, in which he claims divine simplicity became purely logical and metaphysical, with Anselm understanding simplicity in explicitly mathematical categories. While Barth does not object to such categories *per se*, he argues that they should be used only as ancillary arguments to provide illustration. In the classical tradition, by contrast, he argues that they are placed 'at the forefront' of the doctrine, giving the impression that what is being presented is a general idea of simplicity rather than the simplicity specifically of 'the God

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32 Barth, *KD* II/1, 502. [‚Die Einheit des dreieinigen Gottes, die Einheit des Sohnes Gottes mit dem Menschen in Jesus Christus'.]

of the Trinity and of Christology'.[33] In short, Barth argues that we should define simplicity by God's deity rather than defining God's deity by a predefined concept of simplicity.[34]

Barth accordingly recasts the doctrine of divine simplicity as a statement about divine unity, arguing that it means foremost that 'in all [God] is and does, he is wholly and undividedly himself. He is at no time or place composed of that which is distinct from himself. He is therefore at no time or place divided or divisible'.[35] It follows that, in each of God's specific actions, God is never apart from all his other actions, and hence does all these other actions in each specific action. Further, nothing can affect or contradict God 'because in himself there is no difference, distance, contradiction or resistance. He is the Lord in every relationship, because he is the Lord of himself'.[36] This means that every distinction of the divine being and action 'is simply a repetition and confirmation of the one being' and hence 'of all that he was from eternity…and of all that he will be in eternity', again bringing us back to the idea of God's reiterative self-manifestation at every moment as divine constancy.[37]

6.4   The nature of eternity: pre-temporal, supra-temporal and post-temporal

Returning to his observation that the Bible constantly brings eternity into positive relationship to time, Barth notes that it describes God as 'the one who, *before* time, *in* time and again *after* time, is and rules', and who thereby conditions time.[38] He thus argues that God conditions time in a threefold way: 'he precedes its beginning, he accompanies its duration, he exists after its end', which is what it concretely means to say that eternity has a 'readiness for time' actualized in the incarnation.[39] Since God's eternity is his readiness for time, he is 'able to be before it, above it and after it',

33 Barth, *KD* II/1, 502–503. [‚An die Spitze… Von dem Gott der Trinitätslehre und Christologie'.]

34 Barth, *KD* II/1, 504.

35 Barth, *KD* II/1, 501. [‚Er ist in Allem, was er ist und tut, ganz und ungeteilt er selber. Er ist nie und nirgends zusammengesetzt aus Verschiedenem. Er ist also nie und nirgends geteilt oder teilbar'.]

36 Barth, *KD* II/1, 501. [‚Weil es in ihm selbst keine Verschiedenheit, keine Ferne, keinen Widerspruch und Widerstand gibt. Er ist der Herr in jeder Beziehung, weil er…der Herr seiner selbst…ist'.]

37 Barth, *KD* II/1, 501. [‚Nur eine Wiederholung und Bestätigung des Einen…ist… Alles…was er von Ewigkeit…her war und in Ewigkeit…sein wird'.]

38 Barth, *KD* II/1, 698. [‚Den, der *vor* der Zeit, *in* der Zeit und wiederum *nach* der Zeit ist und herrscht'.]

39 Barth, *KD* II/1, 698. [‚Er geht ihrem Anfang voran, er begleitet ihre Dauer, er ist nach ihrem Ende… Bereitschaft für die Zeit'.]

leading Barth to propose the concepts of God's pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality.[40]

Barth turns to examine what each of the three concepts entails. He begins by explaining that "pre-temporal" means that God's existence precedes creation, and that, in this eternity before time, God was not subject to any lack and was no less himself. Pre-temporality thus ensures that God does not owe us anything, whether creation, redemption or reconciliation. Further, in this pre-time before the universe and time existed, everything was decided and determined, making it the time of creation and election, and hence the time in which the Word was determined for incarnation.[41]

"Supra-temporality" expresses the fact 'that eternity does not want to be without time [but] lets itself be accompanied by time'.[42] However, while the present of created time has a fleeting duration, God has pure and perpetual duration in which his "before" and "after" are inseparable. Barth conceives of divine supra-temporality as indissolubly christological in nature, explaining that the incarnation reveals this supra-temporality specifically as God's presence in the midst of history as the person of Jesus Christ. It is under the category of supra-temporality that God realizes those things determined in pre-temporality, and thus wills to be and is God-for-us.[43]

Finally, "post-temporality" completes the sense in which eternity embraces time, affirming that, 'just as God is before and over time, so he is also after time'.[44] As such, eternity is the ultimate goal and end of everything in time, making God's revelation itself 'the goal and end of time' which we wait for 'by looking back on its occurrence in the middle of time'.[45] Since God is the post-temporal eternity towards which we move, he is 'the God of all hope'.[46]

Barth stresses that there can be no rivalry between these three forms of eternity and that all three must be emphasized in their own ways. As such, he rejects the interpretation that any one form should be accentuated over the others, pointing to the Reformers as illustrative of a tendency to overstate divine pre-temporality and thus the doctrines of election and divine providence. Barth, by contrast, affirms that God's presence in time, which derives from his supra-temporality, 'is just as seriously God's eternity as his pre-temporality', and thus cannot be reduced to a mere

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40 Barth, *KD* II/1, 699. [‚Fähig, vor ihr, über ihr, nach ihr zu sein'.]

41 Barth, *KD* II/1, 700–702.

42 Barth, *KD* II/1, 702. [‚Daß die Ewigkeit nicht ohne die Zeit sein will, sich von der Zeit begleiten läßt'.]

43 Barth, *KD* II/1, 702–705. [‚Uns zugute'.]

44 Barth, *KD* II/1, 709. [‚Gott ist wie vor, wie über, so auch nach der Zeit'.]

45 Barth, *KD* II/1, 711. [‚Ziel und Ende der Zeit… Indem wir auf ihr Geschehen in der Mitte der Zeit zurückblicken'.]

46 Barth, *KD* II/1, 711. [‚Der Gott aller Hoffnung'.]

appendix.[47] Likewise, he calls for us to give equal focus to God's post-temporality, and thus the hope of the eschaton, as to his pre-temporality in which everything was determined, and his supra-temporality in which that determination is realized.[48]

6.5   The trinitarian structure of eternity

Yet Barth's doctrine of eternity is not just christological and thus temporal in nature; rather, the unique character of God's "eternal temporality" also reflects his triune relationality. Building on Anselm's description of the three divine persons as '*repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate*' (which we have already encountered in relation to God's reiterative self-willing as triune, in chapter four),[49] Barth argues that the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit presupposes 'a unique kind of moment-to-moment temporality' and thus has an 'inherent temporality and successiveness' to it.[50] This is what it concretely means to say that time is present in eternity. As such, God's eternity can act as the prototype and foreordination of creaturely time specifically because of the temporality of the triune relationship, which means that the 'moment-upon-moment succession of our fractured temporality "pre-exists" in God in a unified way'.[51]

Edwards sees this distilled in the theological pun, 'God is once and again and a third time'; that is, 'God is *einmal* as the Father, *noch einmal* as the begotten Son, and then is self-posited *und noch einmal* as the Holy Spirit'.[52] He argues that the succession represented by this pun is not only ontological but also chronological in nature, expressing that 'God is *repeatedly* this same *triune* God over and over again ontologically and chronologically'.[53] It is this concept that stands behind Barth's claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit mean the one God 'in threefold repetition'.[54]

As we saw in chapter four, however, this triune generation and relationality does not take place just once; rather, Barth argues that 'God's eternal *being-in-koinonia* "co-exists" in ongoing repetitions of the Triune Moment'.[55] Barth accordingly writes of 'God's ongoing and continual self-willing of each "other" as Father, Son and Holy

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47 Barth, *KD* II/1, 711–712. [‚Ebenso ernstlich Gottes Ewigkeit ist wie seine Vorzeitlichkeit'.]

48 Barth, *KD* II/1, 712.

49 Barth, *KD* I/1, 369–370, 414. [‚Repetitio aeternitatis in aeternitate'.]

50 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 73–74. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 623.

51 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 73–74. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 612.

52 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 87. See Barth, *KD* II/1, 693.

53 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 87–88.

54 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 88. See Barth, *CD* I/1, 350.

55 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 94.

Spirit using the language of *Wiederholung*'.[56] Since this application of '*Wiederholung*' to God depicts him positing and willing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in reiterative succession, this concept may be identified as the basis for Barth's temporal rendering of eternity as 'eternal time', as well as the basis for the threefold structure of time in Barth's thought.[57] That is, if God's love for the other within his own triune life is the origin of eternity's temporality, it follows that the overflow of this internal *koinonia* in the election of the human Jesus Christ is likewise the origin of creaturely time, as a derivation of Jesus' revelatory time.[58]

Returning to the idea of eternity containing the distinctions of tense, Barth argues that this distinction is essential, as is an irreversible direction to eternity, to prevent it being conceived of as a uniformity that would prevent God from being the living God. As aforementioned, however, eternity possesses these distinctions perfectly; hence 'before' does not mean 'not yet', nor does 'after' mean 'no more', nor does the present mean fleetingness. The metaphysical underpinning for this assertion is that 'in each of the distinctions of perfection he has a share in the others'; thus, his beginning includes both his end and the way to it, his present includes his beginning and end, and at his end the beginning is still operative and the present is still present.[59] This relationship is indissolubly trinitarian in nature, as demonstrated by Barth's use of the trinitarian term "perichoresis" to describe it, by which he means 'a mutual indwelling and interworking of the three forms of eternity'.[60] Accordingly, Barth sees the unity and simultaneity of eternity as rooted in the intratrinitarian relations. He understands the trinitarian processions as movement internal to God in which there is order and succession and thus a before and an after, yet in which the movement is united.[61]

In this way, Barth is able to avoid the implications of both Modalism and Arianism in his claim that the divine persons are generated in a 'temporal sequence', since God is not the Father, then the Son, then the Spirit '*transitorily* or in a one-at-a-time succession that is *exclusive* of the other triune modes of being'.[62] In the perichoretic temporal sequence that Barth envisages, 'there is immanence, co-inherence, and "passing into one another"'; hence the three persons have a 'perpetual ontic and noetic unity'.[63] Moreover, there was never a time without the Son or

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56 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 94. See, for example, Barth, *CD* I/1, 350.

57 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 94–95. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 639.

58 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 108–109.

59 Barth, *KD* II/1, 721. [‚In jeder seiner Unterschiedenheiten der Vollkommenheit auch der anderen teilhaftig ist'.]

60 Barth, *KD* II/1, 721. [‚Einem Ineinandersein und Ineinanderwirken der drei Gestalten der Ewigkeit'.]

61 Greggs, 'Order and Movement of Eternity', 11. See Barth, *CD* II/1, 615.

62 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 89. See Barth, *CD* I/1, 370.

63 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 89. See Barth, *CD* I/1, 370.

the Spirit because God is 'the triune God in a *three-at-a-time* succession which is perpetually *inclusive* of each divine other'.[64] Barth asserts the unity of these 'successive instantiations' on the basis that the unity of the Trinity means that God's three instantiations are actual in each moment, 'just as God is these three repeated moments of this one divine trinitarian instance'.[65] Thus, for Barth, God is not just three temporal moments in one being but also three modes of being in each temporal moment.[66]

Barth explains how this talk of successive instantiations coheres with what has been said above about divine constancy, emphasizing that 'God has the fullness of God's triune being in each "once" so even this movement from one Triune Moment to another Triune Moment does nothing to alter the constancy of the divine loving'.[67] God's ongoing life is thus not 'a *process of increasing actualization*' but 'a *history of repeated manifestation*'.[68] It is for this reason that time does not affect God as it does creatures, why the coming of each future moment does not change God and the passing of the past does not remove anything from him.[69]

On the contrary, it is the coming of a new divine self-manifestation at each moment that changes the future into the present as a new manifestation of the intratrinitarian love. That is to say, it is God's reiterative self-affirmation as triune that drives eternity from moment to moment. Further, since it is God's reiterative self-giving *ad extra* that establishes creaturely time, it is each reiteration of the divine being that 'differentiates between past, present, and future repetitions' and hence serves as 'the basis for the differentiations of past, present and future' in themselves.[70]

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64 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 92.
65 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 92. See Barth, *CD* I/1, 360.
66 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 92–93.
67 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 109–110.
68 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 110.
69 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 110–111.
70 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 111.

7.   Critical Evaluation of Barth's Solution

7.1   Balancing epistemological reliability with divine freedom

Chapters two through six of this book have examined Barth's solution to the debate regarding how to balance the reliability of christological revelation with divine counterfactual freedom. Over these chapters, I have outlined Barth's use of an *analogia temporalis* to argue that temporal christological revelation has unreserved reliability because it acts as a signpost to God's eternal triune reality *in se*. Further, I have shown how Barth facilitates this *analogia temporalis* by reformulating the classical Reformed doctrine of double predestination into a resolutely christological doctrine of election. In this way, Barth shows that the content of God's eternal predestination is knowable to us, since it is fully enacted on the cross as the election of the Son's humanity via the rejection of the Son's divinity. This importantly replaces the Reformed *decretum absolutum* – an unknowable basis on which an epistemologically inaccessible God determines some for election and other for condemnation – with a decision of salvation whose subject and object are none other than Jesus Christ.

The last three chapters tackled the crucial question of how Barth makes sense of these claims metaphysically, responding to the McCormack-Hunsinger debate regarding the relationship between being and act in Barth's theology. While both McCormack and Hunsinger claim that Barth did not have a coherent divine ontology, I have offered a fresh reading of the *Church Dogmatics* that shows it is in fact possible to trace out such an ontology in Barth's thought. This ontology is able to explain convincingly Barth's varied statements on the doctrines of the Trinity and election, because it reflects the equilibrium that Barth establishes between the reliability of christological revelation and divine freedom. Crucial here was the recognition that the distinct categories of being and act that have dominated contemporary Barthian discourse are in fact alien to Barth.

Instead, I have argued that Barth sees being and act as equiprimordial and mutually entailing in God, meaning that God is a "being-in-act": simultaneously both a being who engages in act and an act which constitutes the divine being, yet without this meaning that being and act are collapsed together. By identifying the first divine act as God's triune relationality, this interpretation retains the space made for divine freedom by Hunsinger. However, by understanding the relationship between God's essential reality and self-determination (that is, between the categories of being and mode of identification) as an asymmetrical unity-in-distinction, the interpretation is also able to understand election as the event in which God redefines his being-in-

act to include relationality with humanity in Jesus Christ, without this entailing an *essential* change in God. Thus, in contrast to Hunsinger, the interpretation is able to provide the necessary underpinning to make sense of Barth's claim that election is robustly ontological in character, as McCormack rightly emphasizes.

To demonstrate that this new reading of Barth is able to retain divine counterfactual freedom despite its robust criteria for the reliability of revelation, the book proceeded to examine Barth's understanding of divine freedom. I showed that Barth is able coherently to propose divine counterfactual freedom through the figure of the Logos *asarkos*, while at the same time emphasizing that God has actually determined himself ontologically as for-us. Accordingly, while God does not need creation, the figure of Jesus Christ (i. e., a divine reality indissolubly bound up with creation) is the only valid way to understand God following his decision of election. This dynamic equilibrium between epistemological reliability and divine freedom is effectively summarized by Barth's key description of God as "the one who loves in freedom", which reflects the equiprimordiality and mutual entailment between being and act in God.

Finally, I showed how Barth's doctrine of eternity is designed to provide metaphysical substantiation for his doctrine of election. Barth bases his understanding of eternity on the incarnation, arguing via the principle of *analogia temporalis* that the temporal form of eternity disclosed by Christ – "revelation time" – must reflect the authentic and original form of the divine life *in se*. Thus, Barth argues that God has a "readiness for time" that grounds both the incarnation and creaturely time itself (as a logical corollary of the former). This doctrine of eternity thus includes a clear distinction between past, present and future, and hence a real succession between events; however, this successiveness is offset by a simultaneous coinherence of the three persons throughout time. Barth justifies this use of perichoretic language by arguing that eternity itself has a trinitarian structure, identifying the divine processions as a movement in God that entails a genuine chronological sequence. These processions happen reiteratively, with God constantly reaffirming his triune reality in new "triune moments" that drive eternity from moment to moment.

7.2 Ancillary eternity: the detachment of the incarnation from election

While Barth's doctrine of eternity immediately precedes his doctrine of election, we have noted that the former is clearly designed with the latter in mind, to provide a framework within which talk of God's eternal incarnation makes sense. This means that Barth's definition of eternity is dictated by a prior epistemological criterion: to be able to claim that Christ's revelation time is reflective of the immanent triune life. I propose that it is this epistemological concern that in fact underlines Barth's interpretation of Boethius' definition of eternity as 'pure duration' containing a

tensed structure and succession. However, since this characterization of eternity detaches Boethius' definition from its metaphysical moorings, it leads to a number of significant problems for Barth's theology, which we will examine in the rest of this chapter.

First, and most prominently, the strongly successive nature of eternity in Barth's theology detaches the doctrine of election from the act of the incarnation, since while the former takes place in primordial time, the latter only takes place in the midst of history. This detachment is heightened by Barth's division of time into pre-, supra- and post-temporality, since election belongs to pre-temporality while the incarnation conversely defines God's supra-temporal presence. Although the content of election is indeed the incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ, Barth's threefold division of eternity places a clear boundary between this "decree" and its actual fulfilment in the event of the incarnation itself. As such, Barth can only define the Logos' identity following election as the Logos *incarnandus* rather than the Logos *incarnatus* known to us in revelation; that is, the Logos merely determined towards incarnation rather than the Logos actually enfleshed in history.

This division creates significant problems for Barth's theology, since his understanding of God as a being-in-act means that election constitutes the event of God's self-determination because it establishes a new being-in-act of elector-elected relationality. However, since election is specifically the election of the human Jesus Christ, this relationship is indissolubly christological in nature, meaning that it is predicated on the actual event of the incarnation. It is for this reason that Barth so actively identifies election and incarnation. But since the incarnation only takes place in supra-temporality, it is unclear in what sense the pre-temporal act of election actually establishes a new relationship with the elect and hence on what basis it can be considered the archetypal event of divine self-determination.

A new being-in-act of elector-elected rationality entails that both terms of the relationship exist, meaning this relationship cannot be said to take place merely in anticipation – that is, with the object of the decision as the Logos merely *incarnandus*. Barth himself recognizes this issue, which is why he provides various arguments for how Jesus Christ himself can be said to be present in pre-temporal eternity. As we explained in chapter three, the dominant reasoning employed by Barth is that 'God's decision of election involves a pretemporal form of the hypostatic union'. That is, in the primordial decision of election, a union of the human essence of Jesus with the divine Logos takes place such that the human Jesus Christ already exists in prolepsis prior to the historical incarnation. Barth explains how this can be the case by appeal to divine foreknowledge: for Barth, it is not that God knows things because they are reality, rather they are reality because God knows them. Accordingly, if in the eternal sight of God, the Word has already taken on a human nature as the object of election, then Jesus Christ exists concretely in pretemporal eternity.

However, if things are reality because God knows and wills them as such, then surely it is not enough to say that God simply *considers* the Logos already to be Jesus Christ and this makes it the case. Rather, the classical argument which Barth employs at this point asserts that the things God knows and wills have *concrete ontological reality* by virtue of this: for Anselm, the image produced in the mind of the supreme being has such a perfect likeness to the thing imagined that it actually is that thing. Thus, when God imagines creation, creation actually comes into existence. If as Barth claims, God considers Jesus Christ to exist from pre-temporal eternity, it therefore follows that the human nature of Christ would physically exist before creation and hence that the incarnation would genuinely be relocated to that point. This is a far cry from the noetic but non-metaphysical "proleptic" sense of existence that Barth is proposing. Rather, if whatever God wills exists, then within Barth's doctrine of eternity the content of the election would have to be reidentified not as Jesus Christ but creation more broadly considered – since creation *does* concretely begin to exist in time as a direct result of election. This conclusion, however, completely undermines Barth's key reformulation of predestination in christological terms: the identification of predestination with creation in isolation from Christ brings us squarely back to the traditional Reformed *decretum absolutum*.

7.3   Problems with Barth's *analogia temporalis*

This separation of election from the act of the incarnation by virtue of Barth's successive doctrine of eternity has the further negative consequence that the *analogia temporalis* becomes in essence the attempt to transcend the actual content of revelation in favour of a qualitatively different, albeit analogically related, reality behind it. This critique is key to the post-Barthian theology of Robert Jenson, which shall be outlined in the next chapter. Jenson argues that Barth's location of election in "eternity" (viz., primordial time prior to creation), with christological revelation merely as its temporal unfolding, constitutes a covert re-deployment of the Platonic analogy of eternity as the archetype of time (viz., the time of revelation), which Barth himself rejected in his *Epistle to the Romans* as natural theology inapplicable to the Christian faith.[1] This use of analogy posits a reality of God *in se* distinct from the *Deus revelatus* and considers the epistemological value of revelation to be its ability to reflect the event whereby God's being is *actually* constituted. For Jenson, this means that revelation becomes a mere shadow of something more primary, implying a deeper, unknowable reality of God beyond revelation that

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1 Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Plato: Timaeus and Critias*, trans. A. E. Taylor (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 37D.

we are consequently impelled to focus on as the true heart of God's reality and relationship with humanity.[2]

Barth's response to this line of enquiry is to argue that the relativization of revelatory knowledge into a pointer to the eternal reality beyond it does not 'mean any debasement or discrediting' of the revelation itself.[3] He explains that revelation is not simply dispensed with in the pursuit of eternal truth because, as we have seen above, it is axiomatic to his theological epistemology that 'God *reveals* himself as the one he *is*'.[4] In this regard, it is manifest that Jenson constructs a false binary when he concludes that any attempt to transcend the biblical story to find the 'real' God behind it is the same as 'declaring the story simply to be false'.[5] Nevertheless, Barth's defence is insufficient to take away the force of Jenson's criticism, as can be illustrated by turning to a similar, yet more nuanced, line of critique found in the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams' *The Wound of Knowledge*. Here, Williams examines the Gnostic attempt to look beyond what is merely 'transitory and accidental in Jesus' to find the divine reality that is merely 'veiled in a historical shape'.[6] While making clear that Barth should not be dismissed as a Gnostic, he notes that Barth's tendency to speak 'of the 'worldly' form of Christ veiling the Word of God' (which we have argued is a direct corollary of his *analogia temporalis*) 'revive[s] the distinction between a substantial and eternal truth and its accidental and temporal clothing'.[7] In short, the strong focus of Barth's theology backwards to pre-temporal eternity as the nexus of his relationship with creation inevitably correlates to an equal focus on the primordial reality of the Logos behind the flesh of Christ.

7.4 Reiterative self-affirmation: between Hegelianism and Modalism

In an attempt to mitigate this focus on a primordial decision that is now over and done with, Barth develops his idea of God's being-in-act as continually reaffirmed at every moment. This means that God continually wills both his triune relationship

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2 Robert W. Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 153–155; Scott R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2013), 65–66.

3 Barth, *KD* I/1, 416. [‚Keine Entwertung oder Diskreditierung dieses Erkenntnisweges bedeuten kann'.]

4 Barth, *KD* I/1, 416–417. [‚Als der, der er *ist, offenbart* sich Gott'.]

5 Robert W. Jenson, 'Does God have time?', in *Essays in Theology and Culture*, ed. Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

6 Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014), 39–40.

7 Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 39–40.

ad intra and his elector-elected relationship *ad extra*, without which both would cease to exist. Barth's intention here is to subsume the act of incarnation into one of these reaffirmations of God's decision of election, making the former simply a created dimension of (and hence indissoluble from) the latter *sub specie aeternitatis*. This, however, leads to two major points of contention in Barth's theology.

First, as mentioned in chapter two, the idea that God's decision of election continues to take place in the present inevitably risks depicting the relationship between God and creation as 'the relationship of a player to his plaything', always in danger of changing form at God's whim. To prevent this implication, Barth reformulates divine immutability as "faithfulness" to his original decision of election, attempting to strike a *via media* between renouncing divine freedom and accepting the potential for caprice in God's relationship with humanity. Barth argues that God retains his freedom in the face of revelation because he is always able to manifest himself in a new form; however, we may have total confidence that these infinitely various forms will always essentially correspond to how God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

The problem with this argument is that, in order to ground the reliability of christological revelation and hence remove any danger that God might contradict it, Barth is forced to argue that 'at no place or time *can he* or will he turn against himself or contradict himself, not even in virtue of his freedom' (emphasis added). As such, a clear tension exists in Barth's theology between the assertion that God retains the full extent of his freedom in revelation and the claim that he can never (even in absolute terms) renounce his self-determination as for-us. The latter leads inexorably to the conclusion that God has bound himself to creation through his act of election in a way reminiscent of Hegelianism.[8] As Barth puts it, without the man Jesus of Nazareth and the people which he represents, 'God would be another, an alien God. According to the Christian perception he would not be God at all'.

As with immutability, we have seen in chapter five that Barth's solution to this problem is to reformulate the doctrine at odds with his argument; thus, Barth asserts that divine freedom should not be understood as independence from creation but rather as God's "self-determination", which he claims represents the original Christian understanding of the attribute. This solution is successful insofar as it explains how divine freedom allows for God to elect and become incarnate without contradiction; however, it fails to demonstrate how God *retains* this freedom as self-determination in any of the subsequent reaffirmations of this relationship. That is, if God is bound to creation and could no longer be God without it, it is not at all clear

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8 Barth seems to have acknowledged this implication of his theology, admitting informally that he does engage in 'a little Hegeling' (as quoted in letters cited by Bruce L. McCormack, 'Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel', in *Orthodox and Modern*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 271).

how he can still be said to have absolute freedom to determine the form his being takes and hence the way in which he may be identified. However, since this means that God's decision of election truncates divine freedom after the fact, it follows that this self-determination alters God's essential reality, breaking down Barth's crucial distinction between the divine being and mode of identification. Ironically, therefore, Barth's attempt to ensure the reliability of christological revelation is the very thing that ultimately undermines it, by suggesting that God's reality prior to election was essentially different from that disclosed in Christ.

Barth's struggle to establish this *via media* between epistemological reliability and divine freedom is heightened, second, by the fact that Barth describes God's reiterative affirmation of his triunity in qualitatively identical terms to his reiterative affirmation of election. Barth accentuates this parallel via his *analogia temporalis*, arguing that election represents the temporal overflow *ad extra* of God's eternal decision of relationality *ad intra*, and hence that each reaffirmation of election drives time from moment to moment just as each reaffirmation of God's triunity drives eternity from moment to moment.

In this way, Barth's metaphysic of the indissolubility of being and act leads to an inability to effectively distinguish God's essential reality from his self-determination. While desirable from an epistemological point of view, the idea that God's intratrinitarian relationality is not qualitatively different from his relation to us sits uneasily with orthodox theology. This is because it suggests that, just like election, God's triunity is a "decree" he freely decides to maintain, and hence that there must exist at least the bare counterfactual possibility of God renouncing his triunity at any moment. However, if this is correct – even if God's constancy means that he would never do this in practice – then we cannot escape the conclusion that the Trinity is merely a contingent reality, resulting in a least a *tendency* towards modalism.

Barth's only recourse to prevent this conclusion is to deny absolutely this counterfactual of the Trinity being renounced by God. However, the clear parallel between God's reiterative triunity and reiterative election means that he must then also deny absolutely the counterfactual of God not being related to creation. And this, in turn seems to result inevitably in the Hegelian position that God loses his freedom as a consequence of his archetypal act of self-determination. By extension, we may thus conclude that Barth's attempt to retain election as a real decision in the present to circumvent the kinds of critique levelled by Jenson and Williams is unsuccessful.

7.5   Eternal succession and the spectre of the *Deus absconditus*

The final significant problem arising out of Barth's doctrine of eternity is the fact that the successive structure Barth envisions for the triune life attaches a before-after structure to the decision of election that is not just logical but also *chronological*

in nature. This is made clear by Barth's claim, noted in chapter six, that the triune processions follow a chronological sequence. However, it follows from this that there existed a concrete (and thus immediately conceivable) reality to God prior to election, and hence a genuine sense in which the Son existed prior to this decision in the form of an abstract Logos *asarkos*.

Thus, while Barth's theology is able to posit that God's determination as for-us is just as true to God ontologically as his essential triune reality, he is nevertheless forced to accept that the Logos *asarkos* exists prior to this determination as a more absolute reality of the Logos (that is, without the contingency of being the outcome of the decision of election). This accentuates the sense in which Barth's theology creates an impulse to look behind Christ to find God's true reality – not just to the decision of election but even behind it as well. Barth's only response to this impulse is to argue that we cannot, epistemologically speaking, go behind the divine decision of election, meaning that it is 'pointless' and 'impermissible' to speak of the second person *in se* 'in such a way that we ascribe to this person another form than that which God himself has given in willing *to reveal himself and to act outwards*'. While Barth argues that this is, in part, an act of faithfulness to the way in which God has chosen to relate to us and hence the way he has truly determined his reality, there remains a lingering sense that we must be content with a contingent disclosure of God in Christ simply because his more absolute reality in which he existed prior to election is inaccessible.

Part II: Building on Karl Barth

8.   Robert Jenson

8.1   Moving beyond Barth

While the doctrine of eternity through which Barth refracts his ideas thus leads
to some significant problems, our evaluation of the *Church Dogmatics* has also
demonstrated that the fundamental structure of Barth's answer to the epistemology-
freedom debate has real promise, and therefore serves as an excellent starting point
in arriving at a comprehensive solution. In deciding where to turn to develop Barth's
ideas, the most obvious interlocutor is Robert Jenson, whose theology represents
one of the most influential and innovative examples of post-Barthian thought in the
twentieth century. The fact that Jenson both recognizes the key issue with Barth's
use of the *analogia temporalis* and uses this recognition as the cornerstone of his
own reimagining of Barth's theories further supports this choice. In examining
Jenson's response to Barth, we will determine whether Barth's argument can be
"corrected" by collapsing the gap between election and revelation in the *analogia
temporalis*, and hence by doubling down on McCormack' radical actualism in the
form of "narratological metaphysics".

Following Barth's example, no feature of Jenson's thought is more fundamen-
tal in shaping his theology than the concern to assert the absolute reliability of
christological revelation. Keen to avoid the Feuerbachian critique that the God
of his theological system represents merely the idolatrous projection of whatever
humanity deems desirable, Jenson eschews natural theology, rendering revelation
the sole source for knowledge of God. It thus becomes imperative for him to deny
any gap between God and revelation, to preclude the implication that Christianity's
most fundamental beliefs reflect nothing more than a "form God takes" in relation
to creation.[1]

As aforementioned, Jenson argues that Barth's location of election in pre-temporal
eternity entails just such a gap between God and revelation, rendering Christ
nothing more than a shadow of God's true reality. He sees this reflected in Barth's
acceptance of a Logos *asarkos* prior to the incarnation, who may accordingly be
abstracted from the historical Jesus as the truest reality of the divine Word. Making
a conscious break from the theology of the *Church Dogmatics*, therefore, Jenson
shuns all use of the *analogia temporalis* in mediating knowledge of God,[2] instead
emphasizing 'that the gospel does not tell of work done *by* a God antecedently

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1 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* Volume 1 (New York: Oxford, 1997), 57–60.

2 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 192.

and otherwise determined, but itself determines who and what God is'.[3] He thus relocates God's self-determining decision from primal to biblical history, defining it as the event of the resurrection and consequently defining God as 'the one who raised the Lord Jesus'.[4] Likewise, rather than identifying the second person of the Trinity as the eternal *Logos*, with the historical Jesus merely as his reflection, Jenson identifies him without remainder as 'the human person of the Gospels'.[5]

Having thus described Jenson's basic methodological principle, we shall now illustrate how he understands God to be *self-determined* rather than merely *revealed* by the resurrection. Jenson's reasoning is that 'The Crucifixion put it to the Father' whether he would accept '*this* candidate [Jesus] to be his own self-identifying Word' and so be a God who hosts publicans and sinners, and justifies the ungodly.[6] The resurrection constitutes the Father's acceptance of Jesus and, by extension, the determination of his identity as the God revealed by Jesus.[7] This means that God is known by us in the very same way he knows himself in the mutual triune life, since this triune life is understood to be none other than the economy of salvation narrated in the gospel. The believer accordingly knows God in that God graciously takes him 'into his own knowledge of himself'; hence, by definition, that there can be no more ultimate knowledge behind this revelation.[8] Further, since Jesus is without mitigation the identity of the second person of the Trinity, it follows that his 'human action and presence is without mitigation God's action and presence'.[9] As such, because Jesus' obedience to death on the cross has concretized his character once-and-for-all as for-us, his (and thus God's) relationship to humanity will always conform to this character, meaning God's revelatory identification is concrete and reliable.[10]

This identification of God with the event of revelation has two negative implications, which Jenson directly addresses. First, if the divine being is determined by the economy of salvation, the fact that the plot of this action is dictated by the fall suggests that, if humanity did not rebel against God, his very being would be different, making God dependent on human actions. To avoid this implication, Jenson denies the possibility of the counterfactual, arguing that humanity was always destined to sin and hence that the incarnation would always have taken place, and

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3 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 165.

4 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 65–66; Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 12.

5 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 136–137.

6 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 189–190.

7 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 189–190; Swain, *God of Gospel*, 98–100.

8 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 227–229.

9 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 144–145.

10 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 200.

with precisely the same content of redemption.[11] Jenson supports this argument on the basis that Ephesians and Colossians not only assert that the incarnation was set forth prior to creation and indissoluble with it, but in doing so interweave reference to humanity's redemption through his death, positioning the content of the incarnation logically prior to creation.[12] Jenson thus argues that the historical economy of salvation was God's eternal plan rather than simply his 'reaction to human sin', and hence that God's being has its sole determinant in the divine will.[13]

Second, Jenson's claim that Jesus is determined as the Son solely by virtue of the resurrection suggests that the divine being is ultimately serendipitous, again implying God's lack of agency in his self-determination. That is, if Jesus was previously a normal human being who simply "happened" to conform to the divine life and *became* the second identity of God as a result, the possibility existed for the divine being to have been constituted at a different time or in a different way. Jenson's rhetoric in fact supports this implication, speaking of multiple "candidates" to be God's self-identifying Word, with the Father only ultimately settling on Jesus of Nazareth for this role in the decision to resurrect him. Nevertheless, Jenson denies this implication, arguing enigmatically that the Bible does not here preclude the possibility of Jesus being the Son prior to the resurrection.[14] As shall be explained below, Jenson's solution is once again to assert the eternal intention of the economy of salvation (and, specifically, Jesus' incarnation as the one who would become the Son), so that the precise character of the historical christological revelation may be reliably correlated to the divine being.

8.2   Identification of God with the resurrection

Yet Jenson does not merely define God *by* the events of the biblical narrative; rather, he seeks to identify God *with* these events and so to argue that God's being is itself the historical event of 'what happens *between* Jesus and his Father in their Spirit'.[15] Jenson justifies this move by arguing that, if God is only identified by, and not with, the resurrection, this identification would be merely a clue to God but not God himself.[16] His methodology thus begins from the axiom that God is known with absolute reliability through Christ, and subsequently shapes his definition of God

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11 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 72–73.

12 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 73.

13 Anne H. Verhoef, 'The Relation between Creation and Salvation in the Trinitarian Theology of Robert Jenson', *HTS Teologiese Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 4.

14 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 142–143.

15 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 65–66; Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 57–60.

16 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 57–60.

to substantiate it, creating a divine ontology dictated by epistemology. Accordingly, for Jenson, 'because God is identified by a narrative, God is a narrative' and 'because it takes time to identify God, God is temporal'.[17]

Jenson derives the doctrine of the Trinity from the event of resurrection on the basis that this event has three agents.[18] First, he notes that God is defined as 'what happens with Jesus', by which God becomes identified *as* Jesus.[19] However, God is also identified in a second way as the outcome of this event for Jesus and humanity, because the resurrection is 'the event in which Jesus is future to himself and to us'.[20] Since the Spirit refers in the Bible to the transformative power of God and thus the power of the eschaton, and since this Spirit is further identified in the New Testament as the spirit of Jesus, Jenson argues that the second identification of God is inevitably referred to as 'Spirit'. Third, God is identified as the will standing behind the event of resurrection, and hence as 'whoever raised Jesus'.[21] Since Jesus' addresses this figure as 'Father', this is the natural third identification of God.[22]

Jenson notes that the Greek understanding of eternity as atemporality forces the reintroduction of analogy into epistemology, since it means that the divine missions of Jesus and the Spirit, as temporal, are ultimately inapplicable to God. A distinction is thus posited between these missions and the eternal trinitarian processions, with the former claimed to perfectly mirror the latter.[23] Since the classical doctrine of eternity dictates that the begetting of the Son could not be temporal, it is not possible to identify Jesus as the eternal Son *simpliciter*; instead, a pre-existent Logos *asarkos* is posited who subsequently *became* Jesus of Nazareth.[24] Jenson thus summarizes that, since revelation is inherently temporal, a theology with a classically eternal conception of God must ultimately view revelation as nothing more than outward symbolism.[25]

This is, according to Jenson, exemplified in the trinitarian theology of Augustine, whose understanding of eternity leads him to reject any narrative differentiation in God, and hence to claim that there is no difference between the agencies of the triune persons. Augustine thus concludes 'that the Son's appearances in Israel could well be called appearances of the Father or the Spirit', and that the Father and Spirit

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17 Francesca Aran Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 268.

18 Jenson, 'Does God Have Time?', 192.

19 Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 22.

20 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 23.

21 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 23–24.

22 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 24–25.

23 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 138–139.

24 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 140–141.

25 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 26.

could likewise have been incarnate and could still do so.[26] For Jenson, by contrast, such indifference regarding the agency of God's historical acts always tends towards modalism, since it reduces the historical expression of the Trinity in the economy of salvation to an "appearance".[27] He conversely asserts that the Son alone could have become incarnate as a corollary of his claim that God's triunity is established in the event of resurrection,[28] and hence that the specific roles of the three persons in this event determine the shape of God's triunity *in se*. In this system, therefore, to claim that the event of the resurrection could have occurred differently is to claim that God's triunity could have had a different form and thus that christological revelation is not definitive.

Contrary to Augustine, Jenson's inherently temporal conception of God allows him to assert that the content of revelation belongs to God's 'very deity,[29] and therefore to define the Trinity without qualification as 'simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community'.[30] In support of this position, Jenson notes that Scripture individuates the Father, Son and Spirit as persons specifically by their 'role differentiation' within the biblical narrative.[31]

8.3   God as event: narratological metaphysics

Jenson secures the reliability of christological revelation by collapsing the categories of being and act to prevent a *Deus absconditus* in the form of a static "essence" behind God's temporal action in history. As such, he reformulates metaphysics from essentialist to narrative terms,[32] subverting the Hellenistic definition of "being" as οὐσία (viz., a 'set of attributes one may be permanently relied on to exemplify') in favour of the modern conception of 'being as history, or time'.[33] He accordingly defines God as 'the plot of his history' and therefore as 'the structure of an occurring situation'.[34] Jenson supports this rejection of God's being as οὐσία through Gregory of Nyssa's description of the divine being as infinite. For Gregory, this means that

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26 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 111–112.

27 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 253.

28 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 253.

29 Jenson, *God After God*, 162; Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 48–49.

30 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 141; Robert W. Jenson, 'God's Time, Our time: An Interview with Robert W. Jenson', *The Christian Century* 123, no. 9 (2006): 32.

31 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 118.

32 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 9.

33 James, J. Buckley, 'Intimacy: The Character of Robert Jenson's Theology', in *Trinity, Time and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 19.

34 Jenson, *God After God*, 106–108, 171–172.

God's being knows no boundary and thus surpasses any identifying description, precluding any list of characteristics by which God can be identified and thus which he must exemplify. Instead, Gregory understands "God" to refer to the 'the divine activity towards us', namely 'the creative event done as Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and future advent'.[35]

Since it does not denote οὐσία but rather the common *action* of the three hypostases, Gregory affirms that there is only one subject of the predicate "God", arguing that the action of the hypostases is completely mutual in 'the perichoretic triune life'.[36] Jenson interprets this to mean that "God" is a narrative in which the three persons are inseparably united agents. Accordingly, he sees God's unity constituted by the coherence of the narrative, namely, the fact that the actions of the three divine agents produce a unified whole.[37] In the same way, he redefines Chalcedon's *homoousios* to mean that 'the *human* Jesus' is of one being with the Father by sharing in the divine life story that constitutes his being.[38] Jenson's identification of the second person with Jesus *simpliciter* therefore does not result in a *tertium quid*, since what constitutes Jesus' divinity is not a bundle of attributes which are united with his humanity, but rather the human actions of Jesus which are perfectly mutual with those of the Father and Spirit.

This treatment of the divine hypostases in strictly narrative terms leads Jenson to define them simply as 'relations subsisting in God',[39] and hence to argue that the three persons *are* their relations to one another.[40] He argues that the western church itself arrives at this conclusion, understanding the relations between each person, which constitute their identifying properties, as 'each identical with the one divine substance'.[41] Since these relations are identical with the divine substance, 'they are real in God in the same way the divine substance is real', meaning that they subsist, possessing attributes and standing as the subjects of actions.[42] According to Jenson, it is for this reason that Thomas Aquinas defines a "divine person" as '*a relation as a subsistent*'.[43]

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35 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 111–114, 162–164.

36 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 214.

37 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 256; George Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: a review essay', review of *Systematic Theology*, by Robert W. Jenson, 2 vols, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 194–195.

38 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 173.

39 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 105–106.

40 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 192–193.

41 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 122.

42 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 122–123.

43 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 123. See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas: Part 1 QQ XXVII–LXXIV*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: R&T Washbourne, 1912), I. 29. 4.

Since these relations are established in the economy of salvation (namely in Jesus' dependence on the Father and his sending of the Spirit), in Jenson's theology the events of the economy exist 'on both sides of the God/creature line' and thus happen to God *in se*.[44] Jenson accordingly argues that it is by just this temporal dynamic in the economy of salvation 'that the three are *God*'.[45] This understanding of the triune identity as relations leads Jenson to conclude that to be the Father is nothing other than being addressed as 'Father' by the Son; that to be the Spirit is nothing other than being 'the spirit of this communication'; and that Jesus is the Son for no other reason than because the above is true.[46] Nonetheless, Jenson makes clear that Jesus does not thereby create the Father and Spirit since, while he is one of the terms of these relations, relations are not secondary to their terms.[47]

Since he identifies "narrative" as 'the overarching genre by which Scripture identifies God', Jenson argues that God has 'a *narrative identity*'.[48] By this he means that God's personal identity, just like a story, 'unfolds according to a temporal structure' and is 'constituted by the outcome of narrative events', such that it is established from the end.[49] As such, God's being is teleological, with God not fully actualized 'apart from the *telos* of history'.[50] In this way, Jenson is able to overcome the *Deus absconditus* remnant in Barth's theology in the form of God's unknowable identity temporally prior to his self-determination as God-for-us and hence as Jesus Christ. By replacing this protological understanding of the divine identity with one which is teleological, Jenson can claim that God is exhaustively identified by his decision of election and thus as the God-for-us of revelation, since this is his identity at his telos.[51]

8.4   Divine freedom as futurity

The idea that God is constituted by the economy of salvation inevitably raises the question of how Jenson retains space for divine freedom. That is, since Jenson identifies God with the resurrection, this event becomes necessary for the divine being, implying that God is dependent on creation. After all, since God's story with creation constitutes his being, creation cannot be 'merely extrinsic to him'

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44 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 105–107.

45 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 107.

46 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 175.

47 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 175.

48 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 67.

49 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 67–68.

50 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 181–182.

51 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 73–74.

without undermining the reliability of revelation.[52] Likewise, Jenson argues that the crucifixion was necessary for the Father to be the loving God that he is, meaning that the cross defines God's nature: the cross does not merely show that God is loving specifically as God-for-us; rather God could not be loving at all without the cross.[53] If creation and redemption are in this way necessary to God's being, however, the gracious nature of these acts is seemingly threatened. Expressed in terms of counterfactuals, it seems that Jenson's system forces one either to deny the possibility of God having acted otherwise (thereby refuting his freedom and the gracious nature of creation and redemption), or to accept the conclusion that God's nature would be different had God acted otherwise (thereby undermining the reliability of the christological revelation in which this nature is revealed).

Counterfactual freedom is therefore incompatible with Jenson's theology, since it presupposes precisely the distinction between God and revelation he emphatically rejects. For Jenson, it is Barth's attempt to retain such counterfactual possibility that leads him to identify God with a pretemporal decision of election rather than directly with the divine action in the economy, leading to his fatal reliance on the *analogia temporalis*. Like Barth, Jenson's solution to avoid the negative implications of this incompatibility is to reformulate the meaning of divine freedom, in his case by rejecting the use of counterfactual possibility as its metric.

Instead, Jenson argues that God's freedom over his constitution in creation should be understood in temporal terms as his *futurity* to what he already is in creation.[54] Jenson points to his assertion that, as a narrative, God's identity is constituted from the end and therefore that God most truly exists in the future. For Jenson, this not only secures the reliability of revelation but also means that 'God is free over against the realized actualities of his trinitarian life with us, because he is always ahead of them.'[55] As such, God can never be pre-empted (and so determined to be other than he wills) by any temporal occurrence. If the structure of the trinitarian life is thus divine futurity, Jenson argues, it is no longer necessary to posit God's freedom via counterfactual possibility, since God is already inherently free (that is, not circumscribed by temporal events).[56]

Nonetheless, despite claiming that counterfactual freedom is rendered otiose in his theological system, Jenson at multiple points refers to God's possession of just such freedom. The Notre Dame systematic theologian Francesca Murphy argues that this inconsistency stems from Jenson's definition of divine eternity as 'temporal unsurpassability', since it suggests that God possesses an indefinite number of

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52 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 86–87.

53 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 191.

54 Jenson, *God After God*, 154–155.

55 Jenson, *God After God*, 173–174.

56 Jenson, *God After God*, 173–174.

'unrealized potentials' that correspond to counterfactuals.[57] Jenson consistently emphasizes the need to affirm God's ability to have established the same self-identity in a different way to defend the reliability of christological revelation; however, he asserts that, beyond simply stating this basic possibility, one cannot say anything whatsoever about *how* God would then have the same identity.[58] For example, Jenson accepts that God could not be *exactly* the same if he had not created the world (since, as aforementioned, he understands the second person of the Trinity to be the historical Jesus *simpliciter*); yet he nevertheless maintains that God would somehow be the very same God despite the fact that the second person would be unincarnate.[59]

Jenson's attitude towards counterfactual possibility shifts, however, in his late article, 'Once more the Logos *asarkos*', in which he retracts both his previous acceptance that such freedom is necessary for God and his appeal to divine mystery to explain how this makes sense within his metaphysics. Instead, he argues in this article that the question of God's nature if he did not create or redeem fallen humanity cannot be answered at all since it is nonsensical,[60] implying that such a question – and hence that the perceived problem – is not even a valid subject for Christian theology.

8.5   Perichoresis and the unity of time in God

As in the theology of Barth, Jenson's doctrine of eternity is shaped by his attempt to ensure the reliability of christological revelation; hence, just as Jenson derives his doctrine of election from that of Barth, so too does he derive his doctrine of eternity. Parallel to Barth's notion that God takes time to be the form of divine eternity in the incarnation,[61] Jenson argues that, in creation, God makes room in himself for others, creating time and making it part of the triune being.[62] He accordingly follows Barth's assertion that past, present and future are in God, understanding this to mean that God makes up the structure of time and hence that these three tenses correspond to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively.[63] As such, he argues that the Father functions as 'the 'whence' of divine events', as the originator

57 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 266.

58 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 47–48.

59 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 141–142.

60 Robert W. Jenson, 'Once more the *Logos asarkos*', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 2 (2011): 131.

61 Barth, *KD* II/1, 695.

62 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 226.

63 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 135–136.

of the missions of the Son and Spirit, which constitute the processions of God *in se*.[64] The Spirit functions as 'the 'whither' of God's life', as 'the power of the future' who comes from the future to transform the present into the future.[65] Finally, the Son functions as God's 'specious present', 'in whom the Father finds himself' and 'in whose resurrection the Spirit's liberating activity is actually accomplished'.[66]

Since the structure of time is identified with God's being, it is a unified whole, such that 'nothing in God *recedes* into the past or *approaches* from the future'.[67] That is, while the distinctions between tenses 'constitute each member of the trinity…the trinity nonetheless transcends those distinctions', because the Trinity is, while three, nonetheless completely one.[68] Jenson thus argues that the tenses are neither simply collapsed into one another (as in the classical doctrine of eternity), nor are they isolated from one another, and it is this coinherence that defines eternity in contrast to time.[69] As in Barth's theology, the transcendence of temporal distinctions by the unity of God's being can be understood through the concept of perichoresis, which, as aforementioned, denotes for Jenson the mutual work of the three persons in which every work 'is begun in the Father, accomplished in the Son, and perfected in the Spirit'.[70]

Jenson argues that this perichoresis is possible because the past and future are 'reconciled in the action and suffering of the Son' whereby God becomes eternal.[71] However, since the resurrection is also the act by which the crucified Jesus transcends time to become eternal, this 'becomes a constitutive element in the triune God's perichoretic unity', as the archetypal perichoretic transcendence of time.[72] As such, it is 'unsurpassable, inexhaustible and paradigmatic for the human race'; moreover, it defines eternity, meaning that this unsurpassability constitutes the temporal infinity of God.[73]

This explains how God can be identified both with the whole of history (as the three tenses of time) and at the same time specifically with the events of the crucifixion and resurrection: because the eternity that surrounds creation is the inexhaustibility of the Christ-event, which unites past and future.[74] Jenson supports

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64 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 194.

65 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 194.

66 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 195.

67 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 173.

68 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 173.

69 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 194–195.

70 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 184–185.

71 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 184.

72 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 185.

73 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 185.

74 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 176–177; Jenson, *God After God*, 172–173.

this by appeal to the 'christological determination of all creation' referenced in Colossians 1,[75] arguing that the biblical story that makes up the divine life is not confined merely to the historical period between the birth and resurrection of Jesus. Rather, the "whence" of the divine life is also the whence of history (the act of creation), and the "whither" of the divine life is also the whither of history (the eschaton). This is because creation exists within the narrative of the three persons who make up this story, just as time is 'the *accommodation* God makes in his own life' for creation.[76]

8.6   God as future

Since the resurrection defines eternity, Jenson concurs with Barth that the character of the resurrection appearances provides vital information regarding the nature of eternity. He notes the elusive quality of these appearances, arguing that they are elusive precisely because the resurrected Christ belongs not to the present but to the future. By extension, this means that the appearances are appearances of the future: promises of a final fulfilment that is 'now characterized as fulfilment precisely of the resurrection'.[77] Accordingly, these appearances reveal the nature of God's eternity not as timelessness and thus immunity to the future, but as 'his futurity to what already is'.[78] Thus, while God makes up the structure of time as a whole, the conviction that God is most truly himself in the future by virtue of the teleological constitution of his identity means he is most truly described as existing in the future. This is true of all people in principle – that their identity becomes concrete at the time of their death – however, the metaphysical 'difference between God and us is that he, as the Spirit, is his own future', which is the basis of his freedom from the constraint of the past.[79]

Nonetheless, Jenson also argues (drawing on Wolfhart Pannenberg) that while God exists most truly at the eschaton, Jesus constitutes the occurrence of the eschaton in prolepsis and thus reveals God's final identity. As such, God may be said to exist in the future but may also be defined as the past event of the resurrection without contradiction, because Jesus' resurrection constitutes the occurrence of the future ahead of time. Thus, contrary to the assertion of Murphy, Jenson's advocation

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75 Jeremy Ive, 'Robert W. Jenson's Theology of History', in *Trinity, Time and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 155–157.

76 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 199.

77 Jenson, *God After God*, 155–158.

78 Jenson, *God After God*, 159.

79 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 143.

of divine futurity does not posit a *Deus absconditus* in the form of God's ultimate reality which will only be disclosed in the future.[80] The future will undoubtedly bring surprises in detail (see Matthew 25:31–45), but God's basic character has been definitively disclosed in Christ.

Beyond stating that God exists in the future, Jenson also argues that time "cannot keep up with God", meaning that he is *always* most truly described as future relative to the believer no matter their temporal location. Jenson asserts that '[God's] eternity is that he can never be surpassed, never caught up with. He anticipates the future in the sense that however we press forward in time, we always find that God has already been there and is now ahead calling us on.'[81] Here, too, Jenson derives this argument from Gregory of Nyssa, whom he interprets as teaching that the mark of God's infinity is not that he has infinite duration, but rather that 'no temporal activity can keep up with the activity that he is.[82]

If one carries through the logic of these statements, it is possible to arrive at a substantial picture of Jenson's philosophy of time. First, we must note that Jenson rejects Hegel's definition of reality on the basis that it creates a scheme of history in which the future '*is already decided*', since Hegel asserts that 'nothing is in the end of history which was there in its beginning.'[83] In so doing, Jenson implicitly rejects the B-theory of time (also known as the "block universe" model),[84] because this is likewise an understanding of history in which all is already decided regardless of one's temporal location. Nevertheless, he clearly argues for the ontological reality of God's past and future, while at the same time claiming that God's is always future relative to creatures, which would be incoherent if time adhered to the B-theory, in which any temporal location has identical ontological status to that of one's own present. When these two aspects are combined, it appears that Jenson understands time within the A-theory, with eternity conversely conceived via the B-theory that is superimposed onto time. This allows him to argue that God possesses his past, present and future simultaneously (B-theory) – and thus that his ontological reality

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80 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 301–302.

81 Jenson, *God After God*, 170–172.

82 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 216.

83 Jenson, *God After God*, 34–35. Jenson argues that history with a definition of what can happen is *past* history, making Hegel's God the God of past history and thus a moralistic God who can only condemn humanity for their sins rather than justify them as ungodly.

84 By way of a practical definition, this denotes the belief that all points in time have equal ontological reality and hence that the distinctions of past, present and future denote only the individual perspective of temporal beings who 'move' through time. This is contrasted to the 'A-theory', which conceives of past, present and future as objective definitions denoting distinct ontological realities, with time itself engaged in the process whereby the future (which does not yet exist) comes into being as the present and subsequently becomes past.

is concentrated in the future relative to the creature irrespective of their temporal location – while still affirming the openness of the future for creation (A-theory).

8.7 The pre-existence of the Son

Jenson's identification of the second person of the Trinity with the historical Jesus Christ *simpliciter* in the pursuit of avoiding a *Deus absconditus* raises the question of how we should understand the references to the pre-existence of the Son in the New Testament (e. g., John 1:1-3; 8:58; 12:41; 17:5; Colossians 1:15-17; Philippians 2:6-7). His solution is to agree that the Son existed prior to Jesus' birth, but to deny that this means the incarnation constitutes 'the addition of the human Jesus' to a pre-existing Logos *asarkos* who was wholly complete in himself.[85] As such, he concludes that Jesus must pre-exist his human birth precisely *as* Jesus. He supports this claim by appeal to Colossians 1:15-17 and Philippians 2:6-7, in which Paul does not refer to a "pre-existent Son" but rather speaks simply of "Jesus" as the one through whom all things exist.[86]

The controlling concept behind Jenson's doctrine of the pre-existence of the Son is his assertion that the term "hypostasis" denotes a *subsistent relation* in God, which leads him to argue that Jesus exists as this relation prior to his physical existence. Jenson explains that the relations within the story of the resurrection that define the three divine hypostases can exist prior to the historical existence of their terms as 'patterns of movement' waiting to be actualized, insofar as one term in the relation (the Father) exists, whose identity is constituted in relation to the others.[87] We must recall Jenson's assertion that the terms must come *before* the relation between those terms in his argument that Jesus does not call the Father into being by addressing him as such. Thus, Jenson clearly does not believe Jesus exists as a discrete entity in this relational form, but rather *in anticipation*. Nonetheless, he uses terms like "ontological" to assert that his notion of pre-existence accords with that of the Bible on the basis that his redefinition of ontology from essentialist to narrative terms means Jesus' existence is specifically narratological in form.

The first framework within which Jenson understands the anticipatory pre-existence of the Father-Son relationship is as God's eternal determination to save humanity through the Son.[88] As Hunsinger summarizes, since Jesus' sonship is constituted by his resurrection, he pre-exists as the Father's eternal intention to resurrect

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85 Jenson, '*Logos asarkos*', 130–131.

86 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 139.

87 Jenson, '*Logos asarkos*', 132–133.

88 Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 70.

him.[89] The second, more dominant framework stems from Jenson's argument that God's futurity as Spirit means his triune identity is constituted eschatologically.[90] Using this logic, Jenson asserts that God's future being is able to determine his prior being, meaning we can speak of the Son pre-existing his historical existence specifically as "the anticipation of his incarnation" in the very identity of the incarnate Christ.[91] As such, Jenson transforms Jesus' pre-existence to his "post-existence", reinterpreting seemingly protological statements in the New Testament describing the existence of the Son 'in the beginning' or 'before the foundation of the world' to refer in actuality to the eschaton.[92]

This anticipation of the Father-Son relationship – whether in terms of the eternal intention of the Father or the constitution of God's narrative identity from the end – leads Jenson to posit the pre-existence of the Son as a 'narrative pattern' in Israel's history before himself appearing in that history.[93] That is, he argues that prior to the existence of Jesus, the Father-Son relationship was fulfilled in the Old Testament by Israel, which is also referred to as God's son.[94] During this period as Israel, Jenson claims, the Son was determined from the future towards the act of Incarnation; hence, he argues that even in this sense there existed not a Logos *asarkos* but rather 'the movement to incarnation, as itself a pattern of God's triune life'.[95]

As Hunsinger rightly points out, Jenson's doctrine of pre-existence means that within the Trinity only the Father is strictly speaking pre-existent (rather than pre-existent merely in anticipation); hence, only the Father is the subject of election and the God of Israel. This latter point is clear from Jenson's identification of the second person of the Trinity as Israel in the Old Testament relationship, and the former is made explicit in his claim that the Father is by definition the 'sole antecedent chooser and sender' in the decision of election.[96]

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89 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 173.

90 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 135–136.

91 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 102–104.

92 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 173.

93 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 141.

94 Swain, *God of Gospel*, 100–101; Simon Gathercole, 'Pre-existence, and the Freedom of the Son in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 1 (2005): 44–45.

95 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 141.

96 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 170–172.

8.8   Tension resulting from the being-act categories

Jenson attempts to ensure the reliability of temporal revelation by collapsing the categories of being and act to preclude any gap that could undermine revelation by suggesting an eternal level above it. However, in so doing he denies God's counterfactual freedom, which presupposes just such a gap between the eternal God and revelation such that he could act differently in time (altering the content of revelation) while remaining the same. Consequently, an eternal reality above revelation repeatedly re-emerges in Jenson's theology to compensate for this loss of freedom, bringing us back to a form of epistemology mediated through an *analogia temporalis*.

Jenson immediately succumbs to this problem in his attempt to preclude the two negative implications of his identification of God with revelation (see section 8. 1. above), denying both charges by asserting the eternal intention of Jesus' existence and resurrection. He uses this same assertion to explain references to Jesus' preexistence in the New Testament while maintaining his claim that the second person of the Trinity is Jesus Christ *simpliciter*. In doing so, however, Jenson undermines one of his key departures from Barth's theology: the relocation of the decision of election from primordial time to the event of the resurrection.

A tension thus exists at the heart of Jenson's theology between time and eternity (i. e., the time of revelation and primordial time) as the location of the divine decision of election by which God's being is constituted, with his theology seeming to demand at least some form of eternal election akin to that found in Barth's theology. While Jenson may argue that this primordial decision is only ultimately concretized in the biblical narrative, this constitutes merely a shift of focus from Barth rather than a qualitative difference. As a result, Jenson falls subject to the very critique he employs against Barth: his theology likewise retains the Platonic analogy of time as the image of eternity, reducing revelation to the mere temporal unfolding of a primordial archetype in the form of God's predetermined decision of election. As in Barth's theology then, the *analogia temporalis* is reintroduced as the reader is drawn back to eternity to understand the basic decision by which the divine nature is constituted, and thus the highest reality of God.

The same fundamental tension is present in relation to Jenson's use of narrative, with the collapse of the economic and immanent trinities leading to an emphasis on the narrative distinction between the three persons found at the economic level that can no longer be offset by an emphasis on unity at the immanent level (viz., that the three persons possess the same divine substance). Murphy argues that this focus on revelation and thus accentuation of difference naturally 'implies a higher Unity which enables us to take account of it', thereby positing a more ultimate God behind revelation and ironically leading to the very modalism this emphasis is designed

to counter.[97] She thus argues that, just as pagan mythology envisions 'a single *rule* beyond the many gods', Jenson portrays 'story' as the one true God behind the three persons, acting as Fate controlling their fortunes.[98] Murphy's thesis is arguably confirmed when one examines Jenson's attempt to assert divine freedom by denying God's dependence on human agency. Here, Jenson argues that while the dramatic nature of the biblical narrative presupposes the possibility of various alternatives, the events nonetheless *had to happen* the way they historically did.[99] This means both that Jesus was always fated to submit to the divine will in Gethsemane, and that humanity was always destined to fall.

Finally, an eternal reality above revelation is most obviously seen in the repeated references to counterfactual possibility in Jenson's theology. Despite claiming that counterfactual freedom is rendered otiose by divine futurity, until 'Once more the *Logos asarkos*' Jenson consistently referred to God's possession of just such freedom, emphasizing the need to affirm God's ability to have established the same being in a different way. Jenson nonetheless attempts to avoid the implication of an eternal reality beyond revelation through appeal to divine mystery, arguing that, while one can simply state the basic possibility that the divine identity would have been the same if God had acted otherwise, one cannot state anything whatsoever about *how* this could be the case.[100]

When pressed, however, Jenson is ultimately forced to admit that God could not be *exactly* the same had he not created, since the second person would in this case be unincarnate rather than the historical Jesus *simpliciter*.[101] His assertion that God would nonetheless still somehow be the very same despite this caveat demonstrates that Jenson in fact believes the God of counterfactual possibility can be said to have the same identity as the God constituted in the economy of salvation as long as the former perfectly mirrors the latter. Therefore, despite Jenson's claims that the economic trinity just is the immanent trinity and vice-versa, his advocation of counterfactual possibility suggests a distinction between these two levels, such that God can be the very same God that he is without the economy of salvation and thus *without the economic Trinity*. Accordingly, as in the classical tradition, Jenson's argument implies that the divine being exists independently of the biblical narrative, reintroducing an *analogia temporalis* as the means by which this narrative provides knowledge of God's ultimate reality.

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97 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 238, 261–262.

98 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 254.

99 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 47–48.

100 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 65.

101 Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 141–142.

8.9   The reduction of divine freedom

This inseparability of counterfactual possibility from the *analogia temporalis* ultimately led Jenson in 'Once more the *Logos asarkos*' to reject all consideration of counterfactuals, arguing that enquiry pertaining to the divine identity if God had not created or redeemed humanity is nonsensical and thus simply unanswerable.[102] For Jenson, since God is defined as the event of the biblical narrative, questions regarding God's identity had that event not taken place constitute a category error (namely the presupposition of the very essentialist metaphysic that he explicitly rejects, such that a distinct οὐσία may be posited independently of the event). However, it is a non sequitur for Jenson to claim on this basis that such questions are therefore not even a valid line of Christian enquiry. Counterfactual possibility in fact concerns two central loci of Christian theology – the doctrine of God and theological anthropology – pertaining to the divine nature and freedom, and by extension to the grace of human existence and salvation; hence such enquiry is an appropriate subject of Christian speculation. It follows that Jenson's inability to respond to these questions, even if they are incompatible with his metaphysics, would constitute a substantial deficiency of his argument, if it can be demonstrated that the ability to make sense of counterfactuals is essential to the functioning his theological system as a whole.

It is my contention that making sense of counterfactuals is indeed essential for Jenson because the freedom he proposes in its place in the hopes of rendering such questions otiose is unable to perform the same function as counterfactual possibility. The classical tradition's assertion that the God-creation relationship is only constitutive on the side of creation is designed to ensure that, while God's decision to save humanity presupposes creation, this event is nonetheless extrinsic to the divine being and can thus still be gracious. In Jenson's system, by contrast, the fact God's decision to redeem humanity is at the same time the decision to constitute his identity as the event of that redemption threatens to reduce redemption to nothing more than a prerequisite that God fulfils in the course of his self-realization. Jenson's proposed metric of freedom as futurity is unable to overcome this problem, since he clearly argues for the ontological reality of God's past and future in his identification of them with the Father and the Spirit, respectively. As such, God's ultimate future identity *does* have a concrete reality, and since Jenson argues that the whither of the divine life is also the whither of creation (i. e., the eschaton),[103] it follows that this concrete future identity is inseparable from, and thus ultimately dependent on, creation.

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102 Jenson, '*Logos asarkos*', 131.
103 Jenson, 'Does God have time?', 199.

Most significantly, however, Jenson does not merely portray God as dependent on history but, by defining the divine being directly in terms of the biblical narrative, renders God dependent on the language by which history is codified into narrative, and so human thought. As Murphy correctly observes, therefore, the development of Barth's notion that 'God is known only in God and by God's act' into Jenson's claim that God can only be known in the *biblical story* itself means that the biblical story absorbs the divine being, such that God can only be comprehended in relation to the economy of salvation described in the biblical narrative, and so 'in relation to our language'.[104] This means that God cannot transcend the divine relationship with humanity explicated in the Bible, because language is understood necessarily to have meaning, and thus to require an interlocutor for whom it has this meaning.[105] However, if the divine being is dependent on this interlocutor for reality, God is inherently related to the human mind, reducing him to an idolatrous projection of humanity.

8.10   Problems arising from Jenson's doctrine of eternity

Jenson's doctrine of eternity is placed right at the beginning of his systematic theology; however, it is employed here only negatively, outlining his rejection of the classical doctrine as the idolatrous projection of human desires into infinity. Thus, while a *prima facie* reading suggests that the doctrine of eternity plays a dominant role in the construction of Jenson's thought, in reality, just as with Barth, the positive content of this doctrine is only employed *ex post facto* to provide metaphysical substantiation for Jenson's doctrine of God, which is itself formulated on the basis of epistemology. Consequently, as Pannenberg notes, Jenson's theology does not adequately engage with the philosophical conception of "God" to produce a robust metaphysic behind his biblical exegesis. Pannenberg identifies this failure to argue for the philosophical validity of his doctrine of eternity as the primary reason why Jenson is unable 'to correct philosophical conceptions of God in the context of Christian theology'.[106] Conversely, where Jenson does explicitly treat God's relation to time, his discussion lacks sensitivity towards the key concepts that dominate

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104 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 120.

105 Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 120.

106 Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Systematic Theology: Volumes I & II', review of *Systematic Theology*, by Robert W. Jenson, 2 vols, *First Things*, May, 2000. https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/05/systematic-theology-volumes-i-amp-ii.

the philosophy of time and neglects the history (and issues) standing behind those concepts he does employ.[107]

This ancillary engagement with the doctrine of eternity in which its content is predetermined by epistemological concerns leads to two further deficiencies that undermine Jenson's theological enterprise; namely, that his doctrine of eternity conforms neither to orthodox Christian belief nor to key features of the biblical narrative. Regarding the first charge, Jenson's identification of the divine hypostases with the three tenses leads him to argue that the Spirit alone is infinite since God's future alone is unlimited. He reiterates this point throughout his *Systematic Theology*, arguing, for example, that the Spirit's power alone is infinite since the Spirit alone 'is the eschatological reality of God', and that, since the Spirit alone is God's 'temporal infinity', he alone is 'God's deity'.[108] For Jenson, the Father and Son are only infinite insofar as they 'participate in the endless futurity of the Spirit'.[109] This, however, creates a hierarchy within the Trinity that subordinates the first and second persons to the third, contradicting the *homoousios* of Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

The second charge is levelled most comprehensively by the British New Testament scholar Simon Gathercole, who argues that the depiction of the Son's pre-existence in terms of anticipation is in serious conflict with the way this pre-existence is presented in the Bible. Gathercole begins by engaging in a survey of the biblical data, noting that a widespread theme in relation to the Son's pre-existence is that Christ is 'the one "through whom all things came into being"'.[110] This theme is found in John 1:1-3, 10, 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:16-17, all of which depict Jesus as the agent of creation.[111] Gathercole argues that this role assigned to the Son is not only frequent in the New Testament but is moreover essential to the biblical depiction of Christ, undergirding the assertion of his divinity.[112] Beyond this "cosmic" pre-existence before creation, Gathercole also notes the common biblical belief in Christ's pre-existence as a personal agent acting 'in the history of Israel'.[113] In this regard, he points to 1 Corinthians 10, which describes Jesus accompanying the Hebrews on their wilderness wanderings, and John 12:41, where Isaiah's vision of God's glory in Isaiah 6 is depicted as a vision of Christ.[114]

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107 Pannenberg, 'Systematic Theology: Volumes I & II'. One might note here Jenson's ambiguity regarding his advocation of an A- or B-theory of time, forcing us to piece this together from his various statements (see 8. 6., above).

108 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 192–193. See Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 143, 160, 216–217.

109 Hunsinger, 'Jenson's *Systematic Theology*', 193.

110 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 39.

111 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 39–40.

112 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 47–48.

113 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 40–41.

114 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 40–41.

Contrary to Jenson's claims that Jesus only pre-exists in the abstract sense of an anticipatory relation, these assertions of the Son's *agency* in history clearly pre-suppose a 'real and personal' pre-existence.[115] In this regard, the German New Testament scholar Jürgen Habermann subverts Jenson's point that the New Testament identifies the pre-existent Son as the person Jesus Christ, arguing that this in fact demonstrates that the pre-existent entity was already personal, rather than some non-personal reality to whom personal nature was added only in the incarnation.[116] Gathercole concurs that Habermann's argument makes more sense of Paul's statements on pre-existence, and thus concludes that Jenson's depiction of the pre-existence of the Son does not accord with the biblical witness. This critique is fatal to Jenson's theology since its whole purpose is to create a system which is faithful to scripture by eschewing the "corruption" of natural theology found in classical metaphysics.[117]

8.11   Critical evaluation: the return to *analogia temporalis*

Jenson's theology constitutes a daringly innovative attempt to resolve the problems associated with Barth's use of the doctrine of election. His identification of God with the event of the resurrection precludes any metaphysical reality beyond God's temporal action that might relegate the ontological significance of revelation by mediating it through an *analogia temporalis*. In this way, he collapses the categories of being and act, transposing metaphysics from essentialist to narrative terms to define God as one perfectly mutual act with three subsistent relations, and consequently as the story of that act as codified in the biblical narrative. The true genius of Jenson's solution is that his identification of God with narrative at the same time grounds his assertion of divine freedom *ad extra*. In contrast to Barth's solution of creating a gap between the divine self-determination and action *ad extra*, Jenson transforms the terms of the debate itself, arguing that, since the identity of a narrative is determined from its end, so too is God's identity determined from the eschaton, meaning that God most truly exists in the future. He thus argues that God is inherently free from the conditions of the past, dispensing with the need to posit counterfactual freedom.

Since Jenson's systematic theology is designed to codify a complete account of the Christian God while avoiding the trap of idolatrous self-projection, his overarching goal is to construct a theological system with revelation as its sole basis. As such, we

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115 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 42.

116 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 42. See Jürgen Habermann, *Präexistenzaussagen im Neuen Testament* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 421.

117 Gathercole, 'Pre-existence', 49–50.

may summarize Jenson's thought to have three fundamental goals: first, to preclude a *Deus absconditus* behind revelation by asserting that God is known *truly* through scripture; second, to avoid relating God to the human mind and thereby reducing him to an idol; and third, to construct a theology that correlates to the key features of the biblical witness.

This chapter has demonstrated, however, that significant problems exist within Jenson's theology that ultimately undermine all three goals. First, his system to ensure the reliability of revelation results in a fundamental tension that threatens the coherence of this argument because it operates through collapsing the categories of being and act. Since God's freedom in his actions *ad extra* conversely presupposes transcendence over those actions, the more insistently Jenson attempts to collapse the two categories, the more tenaciously a higher reality above the *Deus revelatus* re-emerges to cauterize the implied loss of aseity. The spectre of a *Deus absconditus* is thus indissoluble within Jenson's theology, meaning that he is unable to demonstrate that God can be known *truly* in scripture.

Second, Jenson's attempt to avoid the reintroduction of the *analogia temporalis* by reformulating the metric for divine freedom proves unsuccessful. This is because neither his emphasis on God's *choice* to become dependent on creation nor his assertion of God's futurity alter the fact of his dependence on creation for the actualization of his self-determination. The God of Jenson's theology is accordingly dependent not only on history, but, since he is defined directly in terms of the biblical narrative, also on language and thus the human interlocutor for whom this language has meaning. Thus, God becomes inherently related to the human mind, reducing him to an idol after all.

Third, Jenson's doctrine of eternity is unable to stand up to scrutiny because it is employed merely to support his preformulated epistemological concerns rather than being considered on its own terms. Jenson thus not only neglects to demonstrate the philosophical validity of his understanding of God's relation to time but is ultimately left with a subordinationist doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, since his understanding of Jesus' pre-existence as a relation in anticipation is unable to account for the discrete, personal reality of the Son's pre-existence in the Bible, Jenson's theology does not correlate to key features of the biblical witness.

This examination of Jenson's theology has shown that the way to rectify Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate is not by eliminating his use of the *analogia temporalis* to identify God's self-constitution with the biblical narrative. Rather, the serious concerns that Jenson's theology raises regarding divine freedom compared with those noted in our critical evaluation of Barth illustrates that the *analogia temporalis* has an essential function in theological epistemology as long as the Christian faith continues to assert the gracious nature of God's acts *ad extra*. Accordingly, an adequate correction of Barth is to be found not in dispensing with

this principle but rather in finding a way to utilize it more comprehensively and effectively than Barth himself does.

Furthermore, we have identified that a common source of problems for Barth and Jenson's theologies is their doctrines of eternity, both of which are employed only *ex post facto* based on a prefigured epistemological stance. Since their doctrines of eternity thus lack a robust metaphysical basis, both ultimately undermine the two theologians' core arguments. Barth's chronologically successive eternity separates election from the incarnation and forces Barth to argue that God's triunity and election happen reiteratively at each moment. Jenson's "divine futurity" results in a subordination of the Father and Son to the Spirit, and fails to account for those scriptural passages which present the personal pre-existence of the Son prior to the incarnation. We may thus further conclude from our examination of Barth and Jenson that the doctrine of eternity has a clear controlling effect in the epistemology-freedom debate that has hitherto been underplayed, and hence that crucial resources offered by this doctrine have up until now been ignored. It is accordingly the contention of this book that approaching the epistemology-freedom debate through the explicit lens of the doctrine of eternity will provide the means to develop the two most promising features of Barth's argument – the *analogia temporalis* and God as a being-in-act – into a comprehensive solution. The next two chapters will seek to substantiate this claim.

9. The Classical Doctrine of Eternity and God as *Actus Purus*

9.1 Justification and outline

In *God After God*, Robert Jenson states in no uncertain terms that 'it is now widely recognized that the notion of timeless Being is inappropriate to believing knowledge of God'.[1] This statement reflects the almost universal belief among contemporary philosophers and theologians that God is temporal in at least some way, with the classical interpretation of eternity (so-called, "divine timelessness") relegated to the history books as either an unnecessary complication or straightforwardly incompatible with Christian claims about God.[2] This being the case, the question immediately arises of why we might consider *this* doctrine of eternity to be the appropriate lens through which to refract Barth's ideas.

I propose three reasons why the classical doctrine makes sense as the logical next place to turn after reviewing Robert Jenson's theology. First, it is notable that both Barth and Jenson's doctrines of eternity are distinctly temporal in character; hence, if these doctrines of eternity have proven inherently unsuccessful in holding together the reliability of christological revelation and divine freedom, it makes sense to see whether a contrasting interpretation of God's relationship to time is able to fare better. Second, we noted at the end of the preceding chapter that our key criterion in choosing a doctrine of eternity within which to understand the epistemology-freedom debate should be to avoid those which have been shaped by epistemological presuppositions and by virtue of this fact fail to withstand metaphysical scrutiny. Since the classical doctrine of eternity is derived from *metaphysical* concerns, namely, to describe the life of a being who is both absolutely simple and absolutely immutable (as will be outlined below), it stands to reason that it will fulfil this criterion. Third, aside from the post-Barthian narratological theology represented by Jenson, the classical interpretation of eternity is actually the framework with closest ties to Barth's own understanding of the doctrine. This is because Barth claims that his doctrine of eternity represents the authentic understanding of Boethius' definition of eternity, which serves as the archetype for the classical model. Accordingly, since Barth's interpretation of Boethius has

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1 Jenson, *God After God*, 139.

2 Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*: Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1991), 2–3.

proven problematic, it makes sense to assess whether a more traditional reading circumvents these problems.

The fact that Barth explicitly revises the classical tradition over concerns to ground the divine attributes in scripture inevitably raises the question of why we might believe these concerns can legitimately be harmonized with the classical doctrine of eternity. To this I respond, first, that it is equally true that our scriptural faith urges us to profess both that Christ provides reliable knowledge about God and that God's acts *ad extra* are graciously undertaken. As Part I of this book demonstrates, Barth himself clearly acknowledges this fact and uses it as a guiding principle in structuring his systematic theology. Thus, if these two principles exist in irreducible tension within Barth's doctrine of eternity but can coherently be harmonized through the classical interpretation, then there exists a real sense in which the latter is in fact *more faithfully* grounded in scripture. Second, as I shall outline in chapters ten and eleven, many of Barth's key reasons for disputing classical eternity are addressed when this doctrine is read against a Barthian background, ultimately reclaiming it as a viable understanding of God's relation to time.

To gain a grounding in what the classical doctrine of eternity actually is, we will begin with the patristic and medieval discussions through which it was first codified. In Book XI of his *Confessions*, Augustine argues that it is a mistake to conceive of God's act of creation as a discrete event taking place at a particular point in time, since time is itself created.[3] However, if time is created by God, it follows that God cannot be temporal, and so Augustine asserts that the creative Word was not spoken in succession but rather 'in the simultaneity of eternity'.[4] He explains that, while linear time is made up of 'many successive moments', the eternal has neither past nor future but is 'always in the present', meaning that God's entire life is simultaneous and unchangeable.[5]

The next major development in the classical doctrine of eternity came from Boethius, who, in Book V of the *Consolation of Philosophy* provides the definition that has served as the basis for virtually all subsequent understandings of eternity: '*interminabilis vitae total simul et perfecta possessio*'.[6] Such existence stands in contrast to that of a temporal being, for whom the quantity of life possessed at any given point consists merely of the 'moveable and transitory' present moment, while the entirety of their past and future is inaccessible.[7] Conversely, what is eternal comprehends and possesses 'the whole fullness of an endless life together', meaning

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3 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), XI. xiii (15).

4 Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. vii (9).

5 Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. xiii (16).

6 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 401.

7 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 401.

no part of its life has not yet arrived or is no longer available. Such a life therefore has 'an infinity of moveable time present to it'.[8]

In the Middle Ages, Boethius' definition of eternity was taken up and developed by Anselm of Canterbury in a sophisticated treatment spanning his *Monologion*, *Proslogion* and *De Concordia*. In *Monologion*, Anselm concludes that since God has no beginning or end, he 'always has existed, always exists, and always will exist'.[9] Yet Anselm recognizes that this claim seems incoherent. That is, if God exists in every time, then each temporal location must contain either a part or the whole of him. The former renders God composite and is thus immediately discounted. If the latter is interpreted to mean that God is wholly contained in each temporal location simultaneously, this seems to result in contradiction, since these locations are distinct, and so should equally be discounted. If, conversely, it is interpreted to mean that God is wholly contained in each temporal location successively (like humans), his life span is divisible into past, present and future; however, since a simple God's lifespan is his very essence, this conclusion renders God composite, and must be discounted as well.[10]

Anselm's solution to this impasse is to argue that the rule that 'one and the same cannot simultaneously be a whole in several times' only applies to things that are bound by physical laws and are thus circumscribed and delimited by the time in which they exist.[11] The creator of everything clearly would not be subject to the rules of time that he himself established, however, meaning God is not enclosed by time and is accordingly able to be present as a whole to each and every distinct temporal location simultaneously.[12] If God is present to all of time simultaneously, it follows that no time is in his past or future. Anselm concludes, therefore, that God's eternity contains neither a no-longer existing past, nor a not-yet existing future, nor a fleeting present existing merely as a boundary between the two. Rather, as he puts it in *De Concordia*, God 'has no past or future', and his present 'is not a temporal present as ours is' but 'an eternal one in which all periods of time are contained'.[13]

The understanding of eternity developed by Augustine, Boethius and Anselm was consolidated by Thomas Aquinas, under whose influence it became ubiquitous in the western theological tradition. Aquinas arrives at his conception of eternity

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8 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 401.

9 Anselm, *Monologion*, in *The Major Works: Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Brian Davies & G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chapter 20, 33–34.

10 Anselm, *Monologion*, chapter 21, 34–36.

11 Anselm, *Monologion*, chapter 22, 37–38.

12 Anselm, *Monologion*, chapter 22, 38.

13 Anselm, *De Concordia*, in *The Major Works: Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Brian Davies & G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 442–443.

by contrasting it with time – understood following Aristotle as 'the numbering of movement by "before" and "after"'.[14] If time is in this way bound up with succession, Aquinas argues that eternity must conversely be devoid of "before" and "after". Furthermore, since that which is measured by time has 'a beginning and end in time', what is wholly immutable has no succession and so no beginning or end.[15] Aquinas accordingly concludes that eternity has two elements: the denial of beginning or end, which makes an eternal thing 'interminable', and the denial of succession, meaning it is 'simultaneously whole'.[16]

9.2   The logic of eternity

Having briefly examined the seminal accounts of the doctrine of eternity presented in the patristic and medieval periods, the question inevitably arises of why it so essential to these theologians to depict the divine life as a simultaneous whole, without temporal location or extension. To answer this question, it is important to recognize that the classical doctrine of eternity is a deeply indebted to Platonic metaphysics, according to which this understanding of the divine life constitutes the highest and truest form of being.[17] In this section, we shall trace out the logic by which Christian theology arrived at this conclusion and hence the metaphysical undercurrents that have shaped the basic structure of the classical doctrine of eternity.

Augustine, whose theological conclusions have been enormously influential for the western church, is widely regarded to have interpreted Christianity through the lens of Neoplatonism, even employing language lifted directly from Plotinus on multiple occasions in his discussion of time and eternity.[18] Following the Neoplatonic assertion that "true" existence is immutable, Augustine makes clear both in

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14 Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas: Part 1 QQ I–XXVI*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1920), I. 10. 1.

15 Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 1.

16 Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 1.

17 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 63–64. When classical theologians talk about God as the being greater than which nothing can be conceived, this should be understood in the sense of "ontological" rather than "moral" greatness. As we shall see in the rest of this section, the seminal proponents of classical eternity are concerned with showing how God can possess the truest form of existence, not proposing eternity as something which makes God inherently more (morally) good, worthy of preservation or admirable. As such, it is clear that Nelson Pike's rejection of classical eternity on the basis of these latter criteria (Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 146–163) fails to evaluate the classical tradition on its own terms.

18 See, for example, Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. iii (5); XI. xxix (39). Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* IV. 3. 18. 13; *Ennead* VI. 6. 1. 5.

De Trinitate and *The Nature of the Good* that God must be absolutely immutable. Underlying this assertion is a belief that 'existence is a matter of degree' directly proportional to immutability, from which it follows that the highest existence is *absolutely* immutable.[19] However, since Augustine holds that absolute immutability entails classical eternity, he concludes that God must be eternal.[20] The philosopher Nelson Pike, author of one of the most influential modern critiques of classical eternity, explains that absolute immutability denies even the *possibility* of change, while temporal location entails the possibility of temporal duration,[21] which in turn entails the possibility of change. Accordingly, it is logically impossible for an absolutely immutable thing to have temporal location, meaning it must be classically eternal.[22]

In truth, however, for the classical tradition the underlying criterion to which a thing's degree of existence is proportionate is not immutability. Rather, immutability serves to mark another criterion, and it is *this* criterion that dictates whether or not something has the highest degree of existence: namely 'greatest inner unity'.[23] We see this link between degree of existence and unity in Aristotle, Plotinus and Augustine.[24] For Augustine, all things need to have at least some sort of unity to exist, otherwise their individual components would come apart and they would cease to be what they are.[25] That which has most unity is 'in all ways like itself', meaning it is homogenous, without any parts or aspects distinct from the whole; hence, the most unified thing is supremely simple.[26] Augustine argues that temporal objects inherently have 'a low degree of existence' because they are 'scattered' in time, with a duration that is divided into each moment of time that they exist.[27] By contrast, an eternal object has its duration simultaneously and is therefore inherently more unified.[28] Simplicity entails immutability because a "change" is a process whereby one and the same thing 'ceases to have some features while retaining others'.[29] In this way, whatever is changeable must be a composite of those features retained and those features lost.[30]

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19 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 73–74.

20 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 74–75.

21 Temporal location does not entail temporal duration *tout court* because of the possibility of a being existing only momentarily (i. e., in time but without any duration).

22 Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 43–44.

23 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 92–93.

24 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 92–93.

25 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 93–94.

26 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 93–94.

27 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 97–98.

28 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 98.

29 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 99.

30 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 99–100.

The concept of unity is not just the generating principle behind the doctrine of eternity, however; rather, it serves as the very fabric of what it means to be eternal in the classical tradition. As we turn to examine the discussion of eternity found in Plotinus' *Enneads* – a discussion that coloured all of the Christian doctrines of eternity outlined above – we realize just how much eternity is bound up with the concept of unity. In *Ennead* III. 7, for example, Plotinus instructs the reader to think of eternity in terms of unity, and it is on this basis that he arrives at the characterization of eternity seen above as 'without extension or interval'.[31] Plotinus continues that eternity is 'a life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it…[in] a partless completion', and likens this to 'a point' that has 'not yet begun to go out and flow into lines'.[32] It is with consideration to this idea of unity, further, that Plotinus argues that eternity 'is always in the present', without past or future, because this means that the life which belongs to it is 'all together and full, completely without extension or interval'.[33]

These ideas permeate the *Confessions*, with Augustine frequently contrasting time and eternity on the basis of unity; for example, in his aforementioned statement that, while time is made up of 'many successive moments', 'in the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present'.[34] Similarly, it is the concept of unity that stands behind Boethius' characterization of eternity as 'the whole fullness of an endless life together', such that no part of its life has not yet arrived nor any part no longer accessible, in contrast to the 'moveable and transitory moment' that characterizes time.[35] Aquinas explicates the difference between time and eternity based on Boethius' paradigm, arguing that his term '*tota simul*' means a life that cannot be divided into parts, but is rather possessed 'all at once', and that his term '*interminabilis*' means that one cannot "terminate" any part of his life by dividing it conceptually from the other parts.[36]

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31 Plotinus, *Ennead* III, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1993), 7. 2. 31–33.

32 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 3. 16–20.

33 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 3. 21–22, 37–39.

34 Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. xi (13).

35 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 401.

36 Brian Leftow, 'The Roots of Eternity', *Religious Studies* 24, no. 2 (1988): 202–203. Thus, classical eternity is a direct expression of the wider depiction of God as an absolute unity that denies even conceptual division. When one recognizes this fact, it becomes clear that interpretations of eternity as "relative timelessness" are unable to serve the same systematic function within a classical metaphysical framework. Accordingly, when scholars such as Richard Swinburne (Richard Swinburne, 'God and Time', in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honour of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump, 204–222 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 218–222) and Alan Padgett (Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 122–124, 134) propose such models as simple alternatives to "absolute timelessness" without acknowledging that

9.3 God as *actus purus*: Thomas Aquinas' argument for God as prime mover

In order to get to the root of how the classical tradition conceives of God as the ultimate explanation for reality, and hence truly to understand the basic metaphysical forces that shape the classical doctrine of eternity, we cannot stop with simplicity, however. This crucial focus on "absolute simplicity" does not emerge in the thought of our key classical interlocutors in abstract; rather, it ultimately finds its origin in the basic terms "*potentia*" and "*actus*", which serve as the fundamental building blocks of classical metaphysics. It is to these building blocks that we now turn.

Even a cursory reading of Thomas Aquinas' divine ontology bears witness to the importance of *potentia* and *actus* in his understanding of God. These terms represent the Latin translations of two concepts that saturate Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*: δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (as well as the closely related ἐντελέχεια, "complete reality" or "true existence"), into which being is understood to be divided.[37] This division reflects the conviction that reality is made up not only of what exists in the truest sense, ἐνέργεια, but also of 'the sphere of tendencies, dispositions, and capacities that relate to something which is itself not or not yet a reality, but which may become one'; 'a region lying between being and non-being'.[38] The concept of δύναμις becomes essential to our metaphysical vocabulary when we recognize that there are some truths about the world 'which cannot be reduced to' statements about what most truly exists: truths about what something is "possibly", which cannot be formulated simply in terms of ἐνέργεια.[39]

In Aquinas' corpus, we are most visibly confronted with the concepts of *potentia* and *actus* in the famous five arguments for the existence of God, outlined in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I. 13 and *Summa Theologiae* I. 2. Here, Aquinas observes that the world contains an abundance of things that are in motion, but that 'whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another'.[40] He explains that a thing can only be put in motion by virtue of being *in potentia*, while a thing is conversely

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they are thereby undermining the entire metaphysical structure on which classical eternity is based, they fail to genuinely engage with the arguments they purport to refute.

37 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, in *Aristotle: Metaphysics* Bks. I–IX, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: William Heinemann, 1961), i: 2–3.

38 Wolfgang Wieland, 'Act and Potency', in *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*: Volume One – A-Bhu, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski & Eberhard Jüngel (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 34.

39 Michael Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics Θ*', in *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, ed. T. Scaltsas, D. Charles & M. L. Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 173–175.

40 Aquinas, *ST* I. 2. 3; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles - Book One: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 13. 4.

only able to cause motion by virtue of being *in actu*. This is because motion is essentially 'the reduction of something *de potentia in actum*', but a thing can only move from being *in potentia* to being *in actu* by the agency of something already *in actu*.[41] Appealing to Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, Aquinas asserts that something cannot be both *in actu* and *in potentia* at the same time and with respect to the same thing; hence, nothing can be both mover and moved with regard to the same motion. The result is a causal chain as we subsequently attempt to explain the motion of the postulated mover by appeal to a second mover, and so on. Aquinas asserts that this chain cannot, however, go on to infinity without a first link – a first mover – since, regardless of how far back we go, if there is no first mover, there can be no subsequent movers and hence no motion in the universe. Accordingly, it is necessary to posit the existence of a first mover that is itself unmoved, whom Aquinas identifies with God.[42]

Aquinas develops this concept of a first mover in *Summa Theologiae* I. 3, and in so doing importantly concludes that, for God to serve this function, he must be *ens in actu* in a very particular way: as *actus purus*. He explains that *actus* is, absolutely speaking, prior to *potentia* on the basis that something *in potentia* can only be rendered *in actu* by something already *in actu*; hence, if God is the first mover, there cannot be any *potentia* in him. The logic is that *potentia* can only exist as the *potentia* for a particular extant *actus*, meaning that any *potentia* existing in God would necessarily presuppose an *actus*, and hence a mover, prior to him. It is this denial of *potentia* in God that underpins the classical assertion of divine simplicity, on the basis that all composition entails a combination of *actus* and *potentia*.[43]

9.4 Aquinas' dependence on Aristotle: the meaning of δύναμις

The basic argument for the existence of God as prime mover and thus as *actus purus* outlined in the preceding section will be familiar to anyone who has engaged with the work of Aquinas. As such, it is surprising to note just how brief and underdeveloped this argument actually stands in Aquinas' own constructive corpus: nowhere does Aquinas explain the terms *potentia* and *actus*, or what it means to be *in potentia* or *in actu*. Likewise, nowhere does Aquinas explicitly outline what God being *actus purus* might in itself tell us about him. Perhaps even more surprising,

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41 Aquinas, *ST* I. 2. 3; Aquinas, *SCG* I, 13. 9.

42 Aquinas, *ST* I. 2. 3; Aquinas, *SCG* I, 13. 9, 30. It should be noted that Aquinas' issue here is with a logical, not a temporal regress (Aquinas, like Aristotle, has no conceptual difficulty with an infinitely old universe).

43 Aquinas, *ST* I. 3. 1–7.

considering the importance of this argument in the classical tradition, is that a detailed analysis of the concept *actus purus* is almost unheard of within the field of systematic theology, with the meanings of the terms *potentia* and *actus* now taken for granted as their traditional translations "potential/potentiality" and "actual/actuality". This assumption has been perpetuated by a myriad of English-language translations of Aquinas' works that offer these terms as straightforward equivalents to the Latin concepts.

The speed with which Aquinas moves through the argument and his lack of clarification over the terms he employs can only suggest that he expected a significant level of familiarity with both among his intended readers. This expectation was warranted by the fact that his argument is essentially transposed from the philosophy of Aristotle, and (as aforementioned) his terms *potentia* and *actus* are translations of Aristotle's terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.[44] As such, it is unsurprising that the longest sustained treatment of the terms in Aquinas' corpus comes in his *Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, both of which essentially consist of uncritical sentence-by-sentence explanations of the latter's argument.[45] It is therefore clear that if we wish to unravel precisely what Aquinas means to say by his ontological argument, we must turn to analyse Aristotle's own use of the enigmatic concepts δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.[46]

Neither of these Greek terms has a direct translation into English: δύναμις may be translated variously as 'potency, potential, power, capacity', while ἐνέργεια may be translated variously as 'act, action, actuality, perfection, determination'.[47] When we turn to examine this latter concept, we find that Aristotle defines it as 'the presence of the thing, not in the sense which we mean by δύναμει… That which is present in the opposite sense to this is present ἐνεργείᾳ'.[48] For Aristotle, therefore, ἐνέργεια is

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44 Of course, it is important to remember that Aquinas did not have access to the Greek MSS and, in any case, did not know Greek. Further, the Latin text of Aristotle that he used was based on an Arabic translation of the original Greek and thus further removed from Aristotle's original terminology.

45 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's* Physics trans. Richard J. Blackwell & Richard J. Spath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the* Metaphysics *of Aristotle*: Volume II, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961).

46 We cannot simply take Aquinas' statements in his *Commentaries* as representative of his own understanding of *actus* and *potentia*, since these works are largely uncritical exegesis. As we shall note in section 9. 8., Aquinas does in fact significantly depart from Aristotle's understanding of *actus* (and by extension the nature of the prime mover) in his constructive theology, yet this disagreement is nowhere represented in the *Commentaries* themselves, demonstrating their unreliability as indicators of Aquinas' own thought. Nevertheless, they provide valuable evidence of Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle, and will be referenced in the chapter in this capacity.

47 Charles Dubray, 'Actus et Potentia', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*: Vol. 1 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01124a.htm.

48 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, vi: 2.

in the first instance defined by being contrasted to δύναμις;[49] hence, like Aristotle, we must begin our discussion by explaining the meaning of the latter.

Δύναμις and its cognates δύνασθαι and δυνατόν are ordinary Greek words, with δύναμις being roughly translatable as the English term 'capacity'. However, as ordinary words, they have 'a wide variety of uses or senses'.[50] Aristotle, in essence, "picks out" one of these uses and claims it as the truest meaning of δύναμις, with the late scholastics introducing the Latin *potentialitas* as a technical term to denote this.[51] This primary sense of capacity is defined by Aristotle as 'the source of change in some other thing, or in the same thing *qua* other'.[52] In his seminal study of Aristotelian metaphysics, the American philosopher Jonathan Beere proposes to call 'a capacity connected with change a *power*'.[53]

In *Metaphysics* IX, Aristotle also recognizes the existence of 'capacities that are not powers', that is, capacities that are not 'principles of change in another thing'; for example, the capacities to live or think are not powers because living and thinking do not qualify as changes *per se*.[54] By recognizing that living and thinking are legitimate ἐνέργειαι, we also see that there are correlative capacities that are not powers. This prompts a new use of δύναμις, namely as a way of modifying 'the verb 'to be', to say that something *is in capacity*', for which we may use the traditional translation, "potentiality".[55] Beere makes clear, however, that, by moving to talk about potentialities, Aristotle is not now talking about a class of items distinct from powers; rather, Aristotle's point is that there are things 'called 'capable' (δυνατόν) in another way from the way they are called δυνατόν when a power is attributed to them'.[56] This means that there can be overlap between power and potentiality: for example, the power possessed by a housebuilder 'can be considered either as a principle of bringing about change in something else or as the way in which the thing itself *is* a housebuilder'.[57]

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49 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, vi: 2–4.

50 Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3, 50; Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 178.

51 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 3, 50; Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 178.

52 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 50; Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 178.

53 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 33, 35.

54 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 170.

55 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 170–171.

56 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 170–171.

57 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 171.

9.5   The meaning of ἐνέργεια: the case for "activity"

The problem of translation is even more acute for ἐνέργεια than it is for δύναμις, since the meaning of this concept is completely foreign to the English language. In fact, as Beere notes, the concept did not exist in Greek either, prompting Aristotle to *invent* the term ἐνέργεια to encapsulate the 'broad and encompassing' philosophical idea he had in mind.[58] As we shall see, the breadth of this concept means that it cannot serve a clear function in ordinary language, and hence does not exist in the vocabulary familiar to us. Yet, the idiosyncratic origin of ἐνέργεια is actually a double-edged sword: Aristotle's term would have been just as unfamiliar to his original Greek audience as it is to us today, so Aristotle fortunately explains its meaning at length.

The Harvard scholar of ancient Greek philosophy Aryeh Kosman rejects the traditional translation of ἐνέργεια and δύναμις as "actuality" and "potentiality" in favour of "activity" and "ability/power", arguing that 'a central and governing concept' in Aristotle's ontology is that activity is key to being.[59] As such, he sees the structural ability to be latent at one time and active at another as 'the central concept in Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in relation to being'.[60]

This argument for ἐνέργεια as "activity" is, to an extent, supported by Beere, who notes that the most basic, original meaning of ἐνέργεια seems to be 'the exercise of a capacity to do something', such that ἐνέργεια is 'the doing itself'.[61] In this sense, "activity" is clearly the most natural translation. Similarly, the association of ἐνέργεια with change suggests the meaning "activity" rather than "actuality", since 'no one would ordinarily think that actuality is change', while it is conversely easy to understand how someone might think all activities are changes.[62]

Thus, in Aristotle's example of a knower, where having knowledge is contrasted with using it, Beere notes that the translation of ἐνέργεια as "actuality" is very difficult to understand. To take, for instance, knowledge of geometry, there is no sense in which someone who knows geometry but is not actively using it is therefore not actually a knower of geometry. Yet, Aristotle clearly states that such a person is *not* a knower of geometry in ἐνέργεια, which prompts the conclusion that he must mean "is not *actively* a knower of geometry".[63]

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58 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 3.

59 Aryeh Kosman, 'The Activity of Being in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', in *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, ed. T. Scaltsas, D. Charles & M. L. Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 196, 200–201.

60 Kosman, 'Activity of Being', 204.

61 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 161.

62 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 161–162.

63 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 175–177.

The final argument for rejecting "actual/actuality" as a legitimate translation of ἐνέργεια in favour of the straightforward translation "activity" is that, unlike the English "actually", Aristotle nowhere uses ἐνέργεια to contrast "possibility". Instead, when he wants to speak of something as actual rather than merely possible, his prefers simply to use the verb "to be". Likewise, when Aristotle wants to speak of the possible, he does not use δύναμις but rather δυνατός or ἐνδεχόμενος. As such, there are no parallels to the possible-actual pairing found in English in Aristotle's use of ἐνέργεια. The reason for this is that Aristotle understands the whole being-in-ἐνέργεια and being-in-capacity distinction to take place '*within* the actual'.[64] Thus, as Beere explains, 'it is the distinction between the actual having of a capacity and the actual exercise of a capacity' rather than 'the distinction of the actual from something else – the false or the merely possible'.[65]

9.6 The meaning of ἐνέργεια: the case for "activity" *and* "actuality"

As mentioned above, the etymology of ἐνέργεια suggests that it originally referred 'to the exercise of a capacity to do something', which corresponds to "activity" far more than "actuality".[66] To some extent, therefore, the prevalent translation "actuality" is 'an accident of history' – the anglicized form of the Latin *actualitas*, itself derived from *in actu*, which translates κατ' ἐνέργεια.[67] Beere argues that 'it is a holdover from the days in which English speakers who read Aristotle could be expected to know Latin, and to construe English translations in terms of their Latin roots'.[68] However, this is 'no longer the case', and 'now that "actuality" has a life of its own in ordinary and philosophical English, it can no longer be used in that way'.[69] At the same time, however, it is important to note that 'the enduring appeal of this translation is not a historical accident' but rather the recognition that Aristotle uses ἐνέργεια to denote a way of being, which does not obviously correlate to "activity".[70] Accordingly, while the original usage of ἐνέργεια did refer to activities, Aristotle significantly broadens the term beyond this in order to 'focus our attention on the connection between being and activity'.[71]

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64 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 212–213.

65 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 213.

66 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 166–167.

67 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 217.

68 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 217.

69 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 217.

70 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 218.

71 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 218–219.

As Aristotle notes in *Metaphysics* IX, the term ἐνέργεια has implications of ἐντελέχεια, extended from its basic sense of motion. Accordingly, things that are non-existent are invested not with motion (since no non-existent thing is said to move), but with certain other predicates, such as being 'conceivable' and 'desirable'. These predicates are applicable because, while the things do not exist "actually", they will exist actually and may thus be said to exist "potentially". Nonetheless, this potential existence, unlike actual existence, does not have 'complete reality'.[72] Likewise, even when Aristotle defines the reduction of δύναμις to ἐνέργεια as 'motion' in *Metaphysics* XI, he frames this within the context that 'every kind of thing is divided τοῦ μὲν δυνάμει τοῦ δ᾽ ἐντελεχείᾳ' and so concludes that 'motion results when ἐντελέχεια exists'.[73] There is thus an undeniable link in Aristotle's though between ἐνέργεια and the idea of fullest reality, which is what is picked out by the English translation "actual".

As we noted above, however, there are 'cases of *doing* that are not *changes*', of which Aristotle offers the examples of "seeing" and "understanding".[74] Accordingly, if anything that engages in the process of doing something is actual, and doing extends beyond merely changes, then it follows that "actuality" must likewise extend beyond changes. Furthermore, Aristotle also refers to 'substantial forms' of actuality that denote states of being, such as "being a house", which the German scholar of ancient philosophy Michael Frede argues he understands to constitute 'a way of being actual as much as, if not more so than, building a house'.[75] In this way, Aristotle's point in *Metaphysics* IX is that there is a kind of actuality which is change, and that there are other kinds or forms of actuality which equally deserve to be so-called by extension'.[76] In fact, it seems to have been precisely in order to cover doings that are not changes that Aristotle invented the broad term ἐνέργεια.[77]

We may thus concur with Beere that neither 'activity' nor 'actuality' alone can provide a coherent translation of all Aristotle's uses of ἐνέργεια: sometimes he seems to mean a type of "doing" and other times a type of "being". While Aristotle has invented the term ἐνέργεια to capture the unity among these diverse cases, no one English term exists that may be used to the same effect. For this reason, Beere rejects the traditional attempt to offer one consistent translation for all of Aristotle's uses, instead arguing that the key is to understand the connection between the *two* legitimate translations, "activity" and "actuality". Beere even suggests that the entire

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72 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, iii: 7–10.

73 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI, in *Aristotle: Metaphysics* Bks. X–XIV, trans. Hugh Tredennick & G. Cyril Armstrong (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), ix: 1–3.

74 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 12.

75 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 182.

76 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 182–183.

77 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 12–13.

structure of *Metaphysics* IX reflects the distinction between these two translations: first, Aristotle discusses ἐνέργεια as the complement to active powers, and hence as the act of change; then he discusses ἐνέργεια as a higher reality of being, the "actual", in contrast with the merely "potential".[78]

In attempting to use only one word to translate ἐνέργεια, we obscure the analogy between the various uses of the term, which risks making it seem hopelessly ambiguous when we encounter uses that make no sense under our chosen translation.[79] Since the two translations moreover appear to be 'independent concepts', this ambiguity is heightened to the point that Aristotle seems to be using ἐνέργεια in equivocal ways.[80] Beere rightly notes that such a level of ambiguity surely disqualifies this interpretation, since 'it would be utterly astonishing if Aristotle had coined a term, given it an importance second to none in his writings, and then used it in a systematically ambiguous way, without any comment whatsoever on that fact'.[81] Furthermore, Aristotle himself makes clear that ἐνέργεια is used not with equivocal but with *analogical* signification; that is, the various uses of the term 'are analogous to one another', and the examples of δύναμις-ἐνέργεια pairs offered by Aristotle are specifically chosen to cover the broad range of analogous meanings ἐνέργεια can take.[82]

Even Kosman, who is most strongly in favour of the straightforward translation "activity" for ἐνέργεια, links the concepts of "activity" and "actual" in Aristotle's thought via his conception of 'the activity of things being what they are'.[83] For Kosman, Aristotle is *not* saying that the nature of a given species is made up of a collection of essential activities, since members of that species 'may not exercise these activities' without ceasing to be members of the species.[84] Rather, Kosman believes that Aristotle identifies a distinct 'activity of being that is not formally equivalent to any of these determinate powers and activities that constitute the specific nature of particular individual substances' but is instead an activity that defines 'a thing's being what it is'.[85]

In his *Commentary on the* Metaphysics *of Aristotle*, Aquinas clearly agrees that Aristotle uses the term *actus* in two distinct senses. He explains that *actus* can both mean 'action, or operation' and denote a higher form of existence than that denoted

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78 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 3–5, 157.

79 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 157.

80 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 159.

81 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 159.

82 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 160.

83 Kosman, 'Activity of Being', 205–206.

84 Kosman, 'Activity of Being', 211–212.

85 Kosman, 'Activity of Being', 211–212.

by "potentially".[86] Aquinas' own metaphysics are clearly heavily reliant on those of Aristotle; nevertheless, since we have argued above that Aquinas' statements in the *Commentaries* do not necessarily reflect his own views (rather than those of Aristotle), it shall be prudent briefly to demonstrate that this dual meaning of *actus* also hold for Aquinas' own theology. This can be done by showing that Aquinas uses the term in his constructive work in ways that sometimes can only be translated as "activity" and other times can only be translated as "actuality". The former is clearly demonstrated in Aquinas' claim in *Summa Theologiae* I. 3. 8 that, as the first efficient cause and thus as *actus purus*, 'to act belongs to [God] primarily and essentially'.[87] The latter is demonstrated by being the only possible translation of Aquinas' claim in *Summa Theologiae* I. 2. 3, that 'that which is actually [*in actu*] hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually [*esse actu*] hot'.[88]

This interpretation is supported by the Thomist philosopher Norman Kretzmann, who offers one of the few nuanced contemporary discussions of *actus* in scholastic thought. He argues that for Aquinas, in a way parallel to Aristotle, *actus* is appropriately translatable both as "action" and "actuality" because 'a thing *acts* only if and only to the extent to which it *actually* and not just potentially exists'.[89] Thus, the very reason a thing acts in a certain way is also the very reason it is actually that particular thing, meaning 'that in virtue of which *primarily* the thing acts' is '*the substantial form* of [that] thing'.[90]

9.7   The analogy between cases of being-in-ἐνέργεια and being-in-δύναμις

Aristotle makes clear that the there is no one thing which all cases of ἐνέργεια have in common and which therefore allows the term to be assigned a single meaning; hence, as aforementioned, different cases of ἐνέργεια do not have univocal but only *analogical* signification, and we are only able to 'grasp the unity' among these different cases by recognizing their analogy to one another. While this means that there is no 'primary sense' of ἐνέργεια that acts as the middle term between all other analogous cases, 'the force' of these various uses of ἐνέργεια is always the same, namely, to speak of the realization of a capacity and, by virtue of this realization,

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86 Aquinas, *Commentary on Metaphysics* II, Book IX, Lesson 5, 1828–1830.

87 Aquinas, *ST* I. 3. 8.

88 Aquinas, *ST* I. 2. 3.

89 Norman Kretzmann, 'Philosophy of Mind', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann & Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 149, n. 6.

90 Kretzmann, 'Philosophy of Mind', 149, n. 6.

to denote that the thing in question has achieved a greater degree of reality than before.[91]

In the same way, the possession of a "capacity" (δύναμις) must confer 'a certain degree of reality' on the thing in question, on the basis that something that does not exist at all cannot have specified capacities.[92] In contrast to ἐνέργεια, however, Aristotle does present a primary case of δύναμις as noted above, namely the active power to cause a change in another, for which the corresponding ἐνέργεια is the change itself.[93] As well as this 'basic sense of δύναμις', there are 'derivative uses' such as the ability to undergo a change (passive power) and the ability to endure forces that typically result in negative changes (impassivity).[94]

Out of all the analogies of being-in-ἐνέργεια and being-in-δύναμις used explicitly or implicitly by Aristotle, we shall limit our examination to three clear examples that each contribute something qualitatively distinct to our understanding. The first is the case-study that Aristotle uses to introduce and understand the others – that of the housebuilder.[95] Beere gives the following helpful summary of the case of the housebuilder: '(1) To be a housebuilder in capacity is to have, but *not* to exercise, the power to build a house. (2) To be a housebuilder in ἐνέργεια is to exercise this power. (3) The exercise of the power is an ἐνέργεια, namely the production of a house. (4) The production of a house is a change in the materials for the house but not in the housebuilder. (5) The production of a house is the housebuilder's end'.[96]

The second analogy concerns someone awake and asleep, in which case the being-in-capacity is the person asleep and the being-in-ἐνέργεια is the person awake. Aristotle notes that activities which express human life, namely 'perception and self-locomotion' only occur when one is awake, and, when they are absent, it is in fact difficult to tell whether the person is alive at all.[97] From this, Aristotle concludes that the waking state 'constitutes full-fledged or authentic being' while 'the other state verges on non-being'.[98] This is because 'Aristotle does not think of sleeping as something we do, but rather as not doing (namely, not perceiving), due to temporary incapacitation'.[99] In contrast to the example of a housebuilder, the capacity in this case does not constitute a "power" since we are not dealing with a change in *another thing*. Thus, 'through the analogy between this case and the case

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91 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 183; Beere, *Doing and Being*, 180–181.

92 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 184–185.

93 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 184–185.

94 Frede, 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality', 187.

95 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 195.

96 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 195.

97 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 195.

98 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 196.

99 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 196–197.

of the housebuilder, there is also an analogical extension of the notion of a power to the notion of a capacity' more generically considered.[100]

Finally, we turn to the most basic of all of Aristotle's examples: the case of matter and what has been separated out from matter. While this example strips the point to its fundamental constituents, it remains an essential addition to our list because it serves to link the "activity" and "actuality" cases of ἐνέργεια. Beere explains that 'we are to think of the matter as that which has being-in-capacity, and what has been separated out from matter as that which has being-in-ἐνέργεια'.[101] However, in this case the translation "activity" notably does not make much sense, since there is no reason why something separated out from matter is inherently active as a result. Thus, Beere argues that the translation "actuality" must necessarily be introduced here to put across the point that 'what has been separated out from the matter *actually* is'.[102]

9.8   Differences between Aristotelian and Thomist metaphysics

While Aquinas' categories of *potentia* and *actus* are essentially parallel to Aristotle's δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, it is important to recognize that Aquinas significantly departs from Aristotle's thought in his use of these terms. First, and most notably, while Aristotle does not conceive of the first efficient cause in personalized but rather abstract and remote terms, Aquinas identifies this cause as the Judeo-Christian God active in nature and history. Second, while Aristotle understands the role of the first efficient cause as a mere "initiator of motion", Aquinas understand both finite form and matter to be brought into being through God's efficient causality, positioning God antecedent to both and hence firmly cementing his identity as the "creator *ex nihilo*". The consequence of this move is that, while for Aristotle matter and form are related 'as potentiality to actuality', for Aquinas the entirety of a finite being 'is seen as itself in potentiality to its own existence'.[103]

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100 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 197.

101 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 200–201.

102 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 200–201.

103 Joseph Owens, 'Aristotle and Aquinas', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann & Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46–47. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Book XI, Lesson 2, Aquinas examines Aristotle's claim that matter corresponds to *potentia* while form corresponds to *actus*; however, it is notable that he nowhere indicates his disagreement with Aristotle on this point. From this it is clear that we should not consider the *Commentaries* to be reliable indicators of Aquinas' own theology but simply uncritical exegesis of Aristotle's argument, as indicated above.

In contrast to Aristotle, therefore, Aquinas understands a thing's "existence" as distinct from its finite "nature", arguing that this existence is received from an external efficient cause which actualizes a nature that until that moment only had reality as something potential. God alone has "existence" as an intrinsic part of his "nature", such that the divine being cannot be coherently conceived without at the same time understanding it necessarily to exist. In this way, Aquinas follows Aristotle in proposing an *actus purus* standing behind the mixtures of *potentia* and *actus* that make up all of sensible reality. However, while Aristotle conceives of this *actus purus* as a pure form that is nevertheless finite, Aquinas distils *actus* in the world as the very existence of things, which they receive from a God who is thus, considered in himself, none other than 'infinite existence'.[104]

9.9 The implications of God as *actus purus*: God as inherently active

Our exegesis of the concepts δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Aristotle's metaphysics have demonstrated that ἐνέργεια must be understood to mean *both* "activity" and "actuality". Furthermore, as we showed through Kosman, even if the term is translated simply as "actuality", the idea of "activity" remains very much in the foreground by picking out "the activity of a thing being what it is". It is thus manifest that Aristotle sees the concepts of "being" and "act" as indissoluble. By taking up Aristotle's concept of ἐνέργεια and using it as a foundational principle in his systematic theology, Thomas Aquinas clearly sees the most fundamental building-block of reality – "that which is actual", which, for Aquinas, is none other than "existence itself" – as inherently linked to "activity". Thus, we have strong grounds for arguing that Aquinas too sees being and act as indissoluble concepts. As we have noted above, this indissolubility clearly holds for the divine ontology, with Aquinas stating in *Summa Theologiae* 1. 3. 8 that 'to act belongs to [God] primarily and essentially'.[105] Likewise, in *Summa Contra Gentiles* II. 9, Aquinas asserts that God's 'action is his being…God's action is his substance'.[106] We thus arrive at the conclusion that Aquinas' depiction of God as *actus purus* has striking affinities with Barth's divine ontology: that, in God, being and act are equiprimordial and mutually entailing.

This conclusion seems shocking because of the prevalence of modern critiques which depict the classical tradition's God as inactive and inert. The dissonance between such allegations and Aquinas' actual argument can be understood by

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104 Owens, 'Aristotle and Aquinas', 47–48, 52.

105 Aquinas, *ST* I. 3. 8.

106 R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 58. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles - Book Two: Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 9.

recognizing an unfortunately often-overlooked nuance between Plato and Aristotle's metaphysics. In the *Sophist*, Plato draws 'a sharp distinction between what is changeable and what is unchangeable', and argues that it is the latter that 'are most truly beings'.[107] This, however, leads him to associate being with rest while at the same time insisting 'that some cases of being consist in doing: living and thinking', which he understands as changes.[108] As such, he is ultimately forced to conclude that being must consist 'simultaneously in being at rest and in being changing'.[109] While Aristotle agrees that it is the unchangeable that truly exists, he rejects Plato's claim that all doing entails change. As we noted above, "living and thinking" are two types of doing explicitly mentioned by Aristotle as legitimate ἐνέργειαι that are nevertheless not types of change. For Aristotle, in cases where a subject is acting in its natural way, doing what is inherent to it, 'being active is precisely *not* being changed, but simply remaining what one already is'.[110] It is significant that, in support of his argument that not every ἐνέργεια is a change, Aristotle notes specifically the ἐνέργεια of God, which he argues cannot involve change since the divine being is already perfect.[111]

In short, while Plato correctly understands true being as 'stable and hence unchanged', that fact that he has 'no concept for a state that [is] active but not changing' results in a conception of true being as '*inert*', ultimately forcing him to ascribe to being the contrary attributes of rest and change.[112] This internal contradiction with which Plato ends up is what critics ascribe to the divine ontology of the classical tradition. However, when we turn to Aristotle, we find that he 'replaces the whole construction with a single notion of [ἐνέργεια]'.[113] That Aquinas follows Aristotle, not Plato, on this point is essential to grasp if we are to avoid painting the whole classical tradition with the broad brush of "Platonism". Aquinas' characterization of God as *actus purus* does not render God inert since the whole point of this term (as derived from Aristotle) is to refute this association. Unfortunately, this has often gone unrecognized because of the modern tradition of using "actuality" as a blanket translation for *actus* and thereby obscuring its connection with the dynamism of "activity".

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107 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 14.

108 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 14.

109 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 14.

110 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 14–15.

111 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 163.

112 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 15–16.

113 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 15–16.

9.10   Divine activity as triune generation

To see the full realization of this claim that being and act are indissolubly united in God, we must leave our discussion of Aristotle and Aquinas and turn to Hans Urs von Balthasar,[114] in whose theology the principle of *actus purus* finds a place intimately bound up with the concept of triune generation. Von Balthasar explains that, to avoid the Arian notion that the Father exists prior to his event of self-surrender that generates the Son, it is necessary to conclude that the Father *is* his 'movement of self-giving that holds nothing back'.[115] It follows that the act in which the Father generates the Son by uttering and bestowing his whole Godhead is something he not only "does" but also "is".[116] Nonetheless, the Father does not 'lose himself' in this utter self-giving, which von Balthasar likewise establishes in terms of the intertwining of being and act: that God '*is* the whole divine essence in this self-surrender'.[117] This all means that God 'cannot be God other than in this inner-divine "kenosis"'.[118]

Von Balthasar's derives this argument from his observation that christological revelation is primarily trinitarian in nature, since 'Jesus does not speak about God in general, but rather shows us the Father and bestows on us the Holy Spirit'.[119] He argues that this trinitarian relationship should accordingly serve as the basis for our understanding of the divine "being", namely as something 'that reveals itself in the happening history of Jesus himself, as an eternal happening'.[120] In this regard, von Balthasar observes that the triune life is not merely a motionless sequence, since the terms by which the generation of the divine persons is described – such as "give birth" and "breathe forth" – 'express eternal *acts*' (emphasis added).[121] As such,

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114 I turn specifically to von Balthasar on this point because of his importance in chapter ten's examination of the *analogia temporalis* in the classical tradition. As such, von Balthasar serves as a helpful foil to the use of Barth in the first half of the book, to trace out a common thread when engaging with the classical tradition and so demonstrate that it offers a coherent response to the epistemology-freedom debate.

115 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik: Dritter Band – Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980), 300–301. [,Hingabebewegung, ohne etwas berechnend zurückzuhalten'.]

116 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 302.

117 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 303. [,Er *ist* das ganze Wesen Gottes in dieser Selbsthingabe'.]

118 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 303. [,Der nicht anders Gott sein kann als in dieser innergöttlichen „Kenose"'.]

119 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik: Vierter Band – Das Endspiel* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1983), 58. [,Jesus spricht nicht über Gott im allgemeinen, sondern zeigt uns den Vater und schenkt uns den Heiligen Geist'.]

120 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 58. [,Das sich in der geschehenden Geschichte Jesu selber als ein ewiges Geschehen offenbart'.]

121 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 58–59. [,Drücken ewige Akte aus'.]

he argues that we must understand 'these two seemingly irreconcilable concepts ["being" and "happening"] as interconnected'.[122]

This identity between the divine being and eternal happening is expressed clearly in von Balthasar's examination of divine love. He highlights that love only exists in the act of 'giving itself', as represented most clearly in the example of the cross, meaning that 'what is primal is not the substantial noun but the transitive verb' – the *act* or *happening* of love.[123] At the same time, however, '"giving oneself" is not the loss of oneself but the intrinsic attainment of oneself; so *ekstasis* and *enstasis* are one – simply the two sides of the same thing'.[124] Appealing to the German theologian Clemens Kaliba, von Balthasar argues that, if the act of self-emptying is the essential expression of the divine being, then act and being must be mutually entailing in God. Thus, as Kaliba puts it, 'self-giving has its identity by giving itself away. Its self-giving is its preservation'.[125]

9.11   The implications of God as *actus purus*: the incarnation as an eternal occurrence

Alongside von Balthasar, the American Episcopal theologian Francis J. Hall is one of the few modern scholars to truly engage with the Thomist concept of *actus purus*, recognizing that it leads inexorably to a God who is inherently active on the basis that, if God is life itself and 'life cannot realize itself in a state of passivity', it follows that God 'must be characterized by activity'.[126] Hall explores this concept of divine action, noting that, despite our natural inclination to understand God's acts in the finite, temporal, and thus contingent, terms in which they are revealed to us, such descriptions are not in fact applicable to the infinite actions themselves when considered in the divine life. Rather, he argues that the definition of God as *actus purus* makes the point that in God there are no 'latent capacities' (δύναμεις) but only 'active energy' (ἐνέργεια).[127] Importantly, Hall links this claim to the fact that

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122 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 59. [,Wir müssen uns entschließen, diese beiden scheinbar unvereinbaren Begriffe zusammenzusehen'.]

123 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 64. [,Dann ist das Ursprüngliche nicht das substantielle Substantiv, sondern das transitive Verb'.]

124 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 64. [,,,Sich-Geben" ist nicht Verlust seiner selbst, sondern wesenhaft Verwirklichung seiner selbst, so sind Ekstasis und Entstasis eins, nur zwei Seiten desselben'.]

125 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 64. [,Im „Aufbruch" hat „Sich-Geben seine Identität, darin bleibt es. Sein Verschenken ist sein Wahren"'.] See Clemens Kaliba, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976), 39, 61–62.

126 Francis J. Hall, *Dogmatic Theology Vol 3: The Being and Attributes of God* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1918), 272.

127 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 272.

God, as the first principle of creation, is eternal, arguing that, since all divine actions are therefore also eternal, 'they cannot be initiated, as if previously unactualized; nor can they cease, so as to be over with'.[128] Thus, 'whatever God does He does from eternity, so that there was never a time previous to His doing it, nor will His doing it be ended in any future time'.[129] It follows that any incompleteness or temporality attributable to the divine act as manifested in creation is valid only of this manifestation due to the necessary finitude of created reality, rather than valid also of those acts when properly considered in themselves (i. e., as God engages in them).[130]

Like von Balthasar, Hall asserts that God's primal act by which he is *actus purus* is not external (which would make God eternally contingent on creation) but rather 'consists in the eternal generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit'.[131] Nonetheless, he argues that all external operations of God are in themselves just as eternal as the triune processions 'since the will from which they proceed is eternal'.[132] This is demonstrated most clearly in the way Scripture refers to the death of Jesus: while primarily concerned with its historical occurrence and subsequent effects, Scripture also speaks of the death having an "eternal aspect", describing it as 'achieved once and for all' and 'as a living fact of all time'.[133] This is particularly prominent in the books of Revelation and Hebrews, where the lamb is described as 'slain before the foundation of the world' (Rev 13:8), having been offered up in heaven by an eternal High Priest (Heb 9:12).[134]

Von Balthasar makes a similar move when he applies the logic of the eternal intratrinitarian relations to the Trinity's relation *ad extra*, such that the latter is also subsumed into God's eternal act. Von Balthasar reminds us that 'a divine person, even in the act of incarnation and the possession of a human 'I', is pure relation' whose very being consists in the act of self-surrender.[135] Thus, 'the adoption of death in the agony of God-forsakenness can be for the Son (and the other Divine Persons) not only an "alien" work undertaken out of absolute love and joy but also an expression of his very own vitality'.[136] As such, the eternal life that is brought into creation through Jesus Christ 'bursts from the outset the self-referentiality of

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128 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 272.

129 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 272.

130 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 272.

131 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 272–273.

132 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 273.

133 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 273.

134 Hall, *Dogmatic Theology* 3, 273.

135 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 230. [‚Wir vergessen leicht, daß eine göttliche Person, auch in ihrer Menschwerdung und in den Schicksalen ihres menschlichen Ichs, reine Relation ist'.]

136 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 230–231. [‚Die Übernahme des Todes im Schmerz der Gottverlassenheit kann für den Sohn (und die andern göttlichen Personen) nicht nur ein aus absoluter

an egoistic "I"; it *is* utter devotion, which proves itself most perfectly in suffering and death'.[137]

In this way, von Balthasar is able to challenge McCormack's dichotomy between a divine immutability that appears to reduce the Incarnation to an external "addition" and a divine mutability of a sort that claims that, during the Incarnation, 'the divine self-consciousness of the Son sees itself "alienated" in a human consciousness'.[138] He argues that a *via media* is in fact possible, which takes the form of 'the lamb slain before the foundation of the world', in which the two extremes meet. Like Hall, he notes that this "slaying" is not considered a purely heavenly act independent of Golgotha, but rather designates 'the eternal aspect' of the historic sacrifice of the cross.[139] But, more than this, he also argues that the passage speaks of the 'enduring supratemporal state of the "lamb"', and hence both the 'persistence of a "sacrificial state" of the risen one' *and* 'a state of the Son which is coextensive with the whole of creation and thus in some way affects his divine being'.[140]

9.12   The possibility of eternal causation

This conclusion that all of God's temporal effects in the economy of salvation actually take place eternally for God by virtue of his reality as *actus purus* naturally prompts the question of how this is intelligible within the classical doctrine of eternity. Simply put, how do God's eternal acts produce temporal effects? This question will occupy the remainder of this chapter, beginning with a justification that such eternal causation is even possible.

Eternal causation of temporal effects is widely accepted among classical theologians. For example, Aquinas argues that the claim God is eternal does not mean all his effects must likewise be eternal, since effects that follow from a voluntary cause are determined by the will of the causal agent as regards 'its place, duration,

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Liebe und Freude übernommenes „fremdes" Werk sein, sondern ein Ausdruck der eigensten Lebendigkeit'.]

137 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 231. [‚Sprengt von vornherein die Selbstbezogenheit eines egoistischen Ich, es *ist* vollkommene Hingabe, die sich zuhöchst in Leiden und Tod beweist'.]

138 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990), 38–39. [‚Daß das göttliche Selbstbewußtsein des Sohnes sich….in ein Meschenbewußtsein hinein „entfremdet" sieht'.]

139 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 39. [‚Ewigkeitsaspekt'.]

140 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 39. [‚Eine überzeitliche andauernde Zuständlichkeit des „Lammes"…die Fortdauer eines „sakrifiziellen Zustandes" des Auferstandenen…einen Zustand des Sohnes, der der Gesamtschöpfung koextensiv ist und somit in irgendeiner Art sein gottheitliches Sein affiziert'.]

and all its conditions'.[141] This means that 'the effect of the will follows when the will determines not [as soon as] the will exists'.[142] In *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book II, Aquinas explains that God is able to undertake eternal actions with temporal effects by eternally creating the world 'in such a way that certain events will occur at particular times. The conditions sufficient for these events to occur, where those conditions do not include some further act on God's part, are built into the world, so to speak'.[143] In this way, God can bring about an effect at time *t* without this requiring him to act at time *t* and thus have temporal location.[144]

By contrast, the contemporary American philosopher of religion Stephen T. Davis rejects the possibility of a classically eternal action having a temporal effect on the basis that, 'in all cases of causation with which we are familiar, a temporal relationship obtains between an action and its effect'.[145] As such, he argues that the only way eternal causation can be accepted is if we have 'a useable concept' of it on hand; otherwise, we must conclude that a temporal relationship is always *necessary* because it is always present in empirical cases.[146] However, when it comes to the divine ontology, such logic is unsustainable since it is predicated on the misunderstanding that God is just another "being" like the beings of which we have empirical cases. When this is recognized, it becomes clear how, for Davis, divine ontology is absolutely subordinate to our epistemological limitations, such that God can only be something we can comprehend from nature, and hence ultimately nothing more than nature writ large. This argument becomes untenable when one posits that God is the creator *ex nihilo* and thus radically different from (because transcendent of) everything else in reality.

The converse epistemological principle, where direct experience is subordinated to logical possibility, is represented by Immanuel Kant, whose examination of causality is commonly cited by advocates of the classical doctrine of eternity. Kant argues that it is order rather than temporal lapse that is presupposed for causation, meaning causes and effects can be simultaneous as long as a relationship of *logical* ordering nevertheless exists between them.[147] In fact, he argues in *Critique of Pure Reason* that 'the great majority of efficient natural causes are simultaneous with

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141 Thomas Aquinas, *On Creation* [*Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, Q. 3], trans. S. C. Selner-Wright (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 17 ad 6.

142 Aquinas, *On Creation*, 17 ad 6.

143 Jule Gowen, 'God and Timelessness: Everlasting or Eternal?', *Sophia* 26, no. 1 (1987): 21–22. See Aquinas, *SCG* II, 36. 4.

144 Gowen, 'God and Timelessness', 22.

145 Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*: Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1983), 13.

146 Davis, *Logic*, 13.

147 Gowen, 'God and Timelessness', 19.

their effects, and the sequence in time of the latter is due only to the fact that the cause cannot achieve its complete effect in one moment'.[148] For example, a fire takes time to heat another object because the heat it gives off is limited. Since God, unlike the fire, is infinite, however, it follows that the limitation that necessitates temporal ordering does not apply to him.

The contemporary philosophical theologian Garrett J. DeWeese rejects Kant's assertion, arguing that 'causal powers are not transmitted instantaneously between two ordinary objects'.[149] His reasoning is based on atomic physics, according to which there is always some small finite distance between the nucleus of an atom and its electron shell. Thus, 'since causal signals cannot travel faster than the speed of light, an effect will be felt by the electron shell some finite time before the effect is felt by the nucleus', precluding any physical effect from being simultaneous with its cause.[150] This appeal to physical laws is, however, ultimately circular as a refutation of eternal causation, since it presupposes as its starting point that God can only act within a spatiotemporal cause-effect relationship, asking whether a being who operates via physical agency can produce an effect simultaneous with his (temporal) cause. If we consider God to be outside four-dimensional space-time, appealing to the laws of physics is irrelevant, since such laws only concern the limitations of relations *within* the universe. The only relevant point is whether the cause-effect relation is itself logical rather than temporal in nature, and hence whether it can exist without a corresponding temporal succession, which is precisely what Kant argues.

9.13   The simultaneity of time in eternity

If God does not employ physical signals within four-dimensional space-time to bring about temporal effects, therefore, how then does he eternally "embed" his effects in creation? In order to answer this question, we must explore how the classical doctrine of eternity conceives of the relationship between eternity and time. The first explicit reference to this relationship is given by Boethius, according to whom the eternal God comprehends the infinite past and future as though they were taking place in the present. Thus, in the same way that a human might 'see some things in [their] temporal instant, so [God] beholdeth all things in his eternal

148 Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 49. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A203/B248–9.

149 DeWeese, *Nature of Time*, 49–50.

150 DeWeese, *Nature of Time*, 49–50.

present.[151] The implication of this claim is that all of temporal history (past, present and future) has a metaphysical reality in eternity such that it can be observed.

Aquinas follows Boethius on this point, recycling two of Boethius' analogies for the relationship between eternity and time from the *Consolation of Philosophy*. First, in *De Veritate*, Aquinas uses the analogy of observing travellers walking down a road at different times. He explains that a temporal person is like an observer who sits at the side of the road and thus only sees the travellers in succession. Accordingly, while each traveller passing by would do so in the observer's present, the observer would not see them all together but rather at distinct times. Conversely, the eternal God is like an observer at the top of the road seeing all the travellers simultaneously despite the fact they do not walk past any given location at the same time. The use of this analogy shows that 'Aquinas assumes that past and future things are "there" to be directly seen by an eternal being with the requisite visual capacity, even though *we* cannot see them',[152] meaning that the whole of time (the past and future as well as the present) is "present" (in some non-temporal sense of the term) in eternity. Second, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas employs Boethius' analogy of 'the circumference and the centre of a circle'.[153] Again, 'it is only because all of the points on the circumference [temporal locations] exist together and in the same way that each may be related in the same way to the centre [eternity]'.[154] While the location of these points might differ, they nonetheless each have equal ontological reality; hence, 'if time is related to eternity just as the circumference is related to the centre off a circle, then all temporal things – past, present, and future – are on a par ontologically, because they all exist tenselessly in the eternal present'.[155]

Delmas Lewis, who wrote a series of influential papers analysing the classical doctrine of eternity in the 1980s, importantly notes that it does not necessarily follow that 'all temporal objects and events are on equal ontological footing with respect to any one moment of time'.[156] Thus, Boethius and Aquinas' conclusions here should not be taken to entail either that all moments of time are simultaneous (i. e., time is an illusion) or that all moments of time exist regardless of what we consider to be the present (i. e., the B-theory of time). This is because, while all temporal objects and events do co-exist in the eternal present according to an

151 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 403–405.

152 Delmas Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1988): 78–79. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub. Co., 1994), II. 12.

153 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 79–80. See Aquinas, *SCG* I, 66.

154 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 79–80. See Aquinas, *SCG* I, 66.

155 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 79–80. See Aquinas, *SCG* I, 66.

156 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 79–80.

eternal mode of existence, this does not mean that they therefore must exist in all temporal locations in a temporal mode of existence as well.[157]

Lewis' point is best illustrated by appeal to Anselm's treatment of the relationship between time and eternity. When writing the *Proslogion*, Anselm explains God's omnitemporality by stating that God is not in all of time and space but rather all of time and space are in him. Thus, he claims that 'eternity literally contains time' without containing the parts and distinctions of time.[158] These ideas are developed in *De Concordia*, where Anselm argues that, 'just as our present time envelops every place and whatever is in every place, so in the eternal present all time is encompassed along with whatever exists at any time'.[159] Lewis notes that, in order for Anselm's analogy to hold, he must conceive of time and space as 'sufficiently similar'.[160] The claim all spatial objects exist at once in the temporal present is based on the presupposition that all spatial points have exactly the same ontological reality at any one moment of time regardless of their location relative to the observer. Accordingly, Anselm must understand temporal points to operate in the same way: all temporal points, whether in the present or the distant past/future, must have exactly the same ontological reality in the eternal present.[161] Thus, Brian Leftow, perhaps the most prominent contemporary commentator and advocate for the classical doctrine of eternity, argues that, by the time of writing *De Concordia*, Anselm had fully developed his conception of 'eternity as like a super-temporal dimension' that "contains" time and temporal things.[162]

Accordingly, as Anselm makes clear, it might be that 'in time something is not [yet] present which is present in eternity', meaning 'non-existence at some point in time and everlasting existence in eternity' are in no way contradictory.[163] This is because 'something which has past and future existence in time… does not exist [in eternity] in a past or future fashion since it exists there unceasingly in its eternal-present fashion'.[164] Anselm is thus arguing that, 'in the dimension of eternity', not just God but also temporal things occupy the same "eternal co-ordinates".[165] While

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157 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 79–80.

158 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 210–211. See Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *The Major Works: Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Brian Davies & G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19.

159 Anselm, *De Concordia*, 443.

160 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 78.

161 Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 78.

162 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 183–184.

163 Anselm, *De Concordia*, 443–444.

164 Anselm, *De Concordia*, 444.

165 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 183–184.

God and temporal things are thus eternally simultaneous, they do not have the same '*temporal* location'; hence, 'times remain *temporally* discrete'.[166]

Lewis notes that, just as spatial objects remain spatial despite being contained in time, so too temporal objects remain temporal despite being contained in eternity. That is, the spatial objects retain their spatiality but are shown *also* to have a temporal aspect; likewise, temporal objects retain their temporality but are shown *also* to have an eternal aspect. Furthermore, just 'as the temporal present contains all space without being in any way spatial, so the eternal present contains all of time without being temporal'.[167] While the analogy means that everything that exists in time also exists in eternity, it does not follow that everything that exists in eternity (i. e., God) also exists in time.[168] Leftow explains that 'what has no extension in a lower dimension' can nonetheless have extension in a higher dimension (for example, what appears to be a point in two dimensions may actually be a line extended perpendicular to those two dimensions in a third dimension).[169] Thus, God's lack of spatiotemporal extension does not preclude him from having an extended "eternal duration".[170] As such, Leftow characterizes Anselm's argument here as the claim that eternity is 'the outermost dimension of a many-dimensional reality, a dimension that contains other dimensions but is not itself contained by any'.[171]

In sum, the classical explanation for how God eternally brings about temporal effects is not that God's act and being are simultaneous with temporal things *in time*, but rather that God and temporal things co-exist *in eternity*.[172] This idea allows us to argue that God acts on temporal entities insofar as they are present with him in eternity, but that these actions nevertheless have consequences for the entities' existence in time.[173] This is because the eternal causes are *ontologically* (rather than

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166 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 183–184.

167 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 212. See Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 77–78.

168 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 212. See Lewis, 'Eternity, Time and Tenselessness', 77–78.

169 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 213–214.

170 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 214.

171 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 210–211.

172 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 265.

173 This conclusion notably refutes Padgett's claim that a classically eternal God cannot sustain the universe within an A-theory of time (see Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, 50–63). Padgett argues that, since the A-theory proposes that only the present has ontological reality, the universe – and hence God's act sustaining it – must change with each passing moment. Divine simplicity entails that such a changing act correlates to a changing nature, rendering God mutable and hence temporal. By contrast, Lewis and Leftow argue that, even within an A-theory of time, every moment and every temporal entity – whether past, present or future – exists in eternity for God to sustain through one eternal, immutable act.

temporally) prior to their temporal effects. We may thus conclude with Leftow that God 'need not act on temporal things in time to act on temporal things'.[174]

9.14 Eternal incarnation

If God brings about events in time by virtue of his simultaneity with their "eternal co-ordinates", then it follows that all divine acts are not just undertaken simultaneously by God, but are also "everlasting" for God (that is, they are without beginning or end, just as *actus purus* implies), regardless of the location and extension of their temporal expressions. As such, temporal divine acts do not constitute intrinsic changes for God since there is no before/after scheme in eternity that such a change would require. Thus, while the beginning of Jesus' human nature may have a distinct *temporal* location, prior to which this human nature did not exist, in *eternity* there is no period "before" the existence of the human nature (i. e., when considering this event's "eternal co-ordinates"). Accordingly, as Leftow explains, 'if God is timeless and is incarnate, then he just is timelessly incarnate: the whole of his timeless life is spent so'.[175]

Another way to understand this is by considering the incarnation as an event with a 'scattered temporal location'.[176] An example of such an event is the killing of someone by shooting them: while the act of shooting might take place at t_1, the actual killing is only complete at t_2 when the person who has been shot dies. Nevertheless, we do not say that the killing was a continuous event from t_1 to t_2; rather, it is a 'scattered' event, consisting of (1) the shooting and (2) the death. Likewise, the incarnation is a scattered event consisting of (1) God eternally engaging in the event of adding a human (and thus temporal) nature to the divine hypostasis of the Son, and (2) the coming into existence of this human nature in the person of Jesus Christ in 4 BCE. It is only at this logically subsequent temporal point that the event is complete, yet this completion entails no intrinsic change in God but 'only in temporal things'.[177]

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174 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 244–245.

175 Brian Leftow, 'A Timeless God Incarnate', in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall & Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 296. This conclusion overcomes R. T. Mullins' critique that the divine Son could not have been embodied as the human Jesus Christ temporally prior to the latter's historical existence and hence that God would have to change (and so be temporal) to become incarnate (see Mullins, *End of Timeless God*, 185). It is manifest that Mullins is here presupposing a temporally successive framework alien to classical eternity.

176 Leftow, 'Timeless God Incarnate', 298.

177 Leftow, 'Timeless God Incarnate', 298–299.

If all divine actions are undertaken eternally, without beginning or end, then it is true to say that God engages in each action throughout the entire span of the temporal universe (that is, at any temporal location, it would be true to say that God is eternally engaging in a given activity). For this reason, the things God does are not simply accidental to him as they are to us; rather they constitute *who* God is: God can never be considered devoid of his acts without engaging in abstraction. Thus, since it always has been true and always will be true to say that the Word is incarnate with respect to the immanent Trinity, Jesus Christ is simply *who* the Word is; not some qualified temporal reality of the Word whose identity with the latter is only true during a particular period of history.

9.15 From being-in-act to *actus purus*: no other Logos but Christ

In this way, the classical doctrine of eternity, and the associated concept of God as *actus purus*, is able to achieve a key motif in Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate. Barth argues that God is a being-in-act, which we have argued means that being and act in God are equiprimordial and mutually entailing. From this it follows that the incarnation is not merely something that God does accidentally; rather, it redetermines the shape of the divine being-in-act (without changing its essential content) from the act of intratrinitarian relationality to this act *plus* a new elector-elected relationality. As such, since the occurrence of the incarnation, there is no reality of God in which he is not engaged in this gracious relationship of love *ad extra* and hence in which he is not identifiable as "God-for-us". Put in terms of the second person of the Trinity, there is no way in which we can consider the Logos devoid of flesh without engaging in abstraction. In this chapter, we have shown that the often-misunderstood concept of *actus purus* actually presents a God, like that of Barth's divine ontology, who is inherently engaged in act, who is none other than his act, and who is active specifically as the event of triune relationality. It is thus manifest that, far from the supposedly essentialist metaphysics that Barth and Jenson (among others) accuse the classical tradition of representing, *actus purus* likewise presents being and act in God as equiprimordial and mutually entailing.

Moreover, the use of *actus purus* to arrive at this conclusion has a notable advantage over Barth's concept of God as a being-in-act. The successive understanding of eternity within which Barth understands the divine ontology forces him to propose an intermediate state of the Logos subsequent to the decision of election but before its realization in the event of the incarnation (the Logos *incarnandus*). By contrast, the classical doctrine of eternity facilitates an eternal act of incarnation such that God can be described as eternally *ensarkos* despite the fact that the incarnation was only actualized in time at around 4 BCE and despite the earthly life of the historical

Jesus only lasting approximately thirty years. This is because the temporal mode is inapplicable to the immanent Trinity, meaning we cannot speak of the Logos becoming enfleshed "at a particular point" from the divine perspective. Consequently, the incarnation is more definitive of the Logos' immanent being when considered within the classical model than is possible within Barth's theology, ensuring the reliability of revelation by ultimately *rejecting* any rigid distinction between the immanent and economic levels. That is, the incarnate Jesus becomes not just an epistemological but also a *metaphysical* connection between creation and God, because he is precisely the same both economically and immanently.

Further, since the concept of *actus purus* allows all divine acts to be understood as inherently without beginning or end, there is no need to posit reiterations of God's triunity and election in time. By extension, we are able to retain the metaphysically robust sense of God's immutability classically conceived, rather than needing to reduce this concept to the mere assertion of God's faithfulness to his identity *despite* changing. More significantly still, since classical eternity precludes the succession to which Barthian eternity is subject, the question of whether God has even the bare possibility of rescinding his triunity and election that dogs Barth's argument can simply be side-stepped as a category error. That is, it is a logical impossibility for God to rescind his decisions, not because of any loss of aseity but simply because his relationship with time renders the very concept of rescinding an action incoherent. In this way, we are able to reconcile, without tension, the assertion that God is intrinsically triune with the affirmation that God is absolutely free both (logically) before and after his decision of election.

Our conclusion that the incarnation is an eternal occurrence within the immanent divine life, and hence that, within the framework of this immanent life, there is no basis for speaking of the Logos as *asarkos*, is implied by the classical doctrine of eternity alone, without reference to God as *actus purus*. Nonetheless, this chapter has chosen to derive this conclusion from the latter principle specifically because it allows us to refute even the *notional* idea that the Logos has a higher reality apart from the hypostatic union disclosed in revelation. Without mediating the eternity of the incarnation through the concept of *actus purus*, this event is liable to be understood within the essentialist metaphysical framework so commonly ascribed to the classical tradition. In this case, a *Deus absconditus* would emerge behind this act in the form of an abstract divine essence that can comprehensively be described without reference to any relationship *ad extra*. Within this framework, where all God's acts are merely accidental to the divine being (in spite of the insistence that God eternally engages in them), we fall subject to McCormack's critique that the incarnation has no bearing on what God is essentially, and hence that Christ's disclosure of God as for-us tells us nothing about God *in se*. That is, even if an undetermined Logos *asarkos* never has temporally extended reality when understood within the classical doctrine of eternity, the Son's identity as Christ

could still be nothing more than a mask that he wears in relation to humanity. It is the concept of *actus purus* that allows von Balthasar to affirm instead that, while immutable, God is nevertheless genuinely enriched by his relationship *ad extra*.

10.   The Classical Doctrine of Eternity and the *Analogia Temporalis*

10.1   "Time" as a divine name

In our examination of Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate, we identified two key motifs which he employs to facilitate his doctrine of election. In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that the first of these two motifs – the concept of God as a being-in-act – is strikingly paralleled but surpassed by the principle of *actus purus* associated with the classical doctrine of eternity. In this chapter, we turn to the second motif – the *analogia temporalis* – to show that this too can be derived directly from the classical doctrine of eternity. Moreover, we will explain how reading the *analogia temporalis* within the framework of classical eternity bridges the separation of God's primordial reality from the incarnation that results in Barth ultimately transcending revelation in his pursuit of God's immanent truth. Thus, as with *actus purus*, we will see that translating Barth's doctrine of election through the classical conception of eternity offers substantial advantages over its original articulation.

As the preceding chapter outlined, it was common practice in the patristic and medieval periods to contrast time and eternity on the basis of unity. This is exemplified in Plotinus' and, following him, Augustine's characterization of time as a 'distention' of eternity.[1] Boethius suggests a similar relationship, stating that 'the infinite motion of temporal things imitateth the present state of the unmoveable life [viz., eternity]'.[2] However, he argues that the former is unable to equal the latter, and thus merely emulates it in part through the fleeting present as a pale 'image' of the eternal present.[3] This notion that time is a failed imitation of eternity ultimately goes back to Plato, who in the *Timaeus* argues that God sought to make the universe as much like the eternal model as possible; however, since it would be impossible wholly to confer everlasting life on a creature, he made the universe 'a moving likeness' of 'everlastingness that abides in unity' instead, namely time.[4] Thus, despite the fact that time and eternity are 'defined by their opposition to each other', the classical tradition importantly envisions a relationship between the two

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1 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 3. 16–20; Augustine, *Confessions*, XI. xxvi (33).

2 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 403.

3 Boethius, *Consolation*, Book V, 403.

4 Plato, *Timaeus*, 37C-37D.

precisely in their antithesis, such that dialectic and analogy are merely 'two sides of the same phenomenon'.[5]

It follows that eternity is not adequately described as a state devoid of time but rather as time's archetypal form: if time is simply a logically posterior distention of eternity, then eternity represents the true, unified reality of time. We thus arrive at the surprising conclusion that the label for classical eternity so ubiquitous in contemporary theology – "absolute timelessness" – actually constitutes a fundamental misunderstanding of the way eternity was conceived in its seminal Platonic and Patristic articulations. The advocate of classical eternity may thus in fact share Barth's sentiment (originally intended as an overt contradiction of the classical model) that God is 'supremely temporal' because 'his eternity is the true temporality, and thus the source of all time'.[6]

Bearing in mind this conclusion, it is notable that the identification of eternity with the divine being itself is found throughout the classical tradition. Plotinus argues that eternity is 'identical with the god' and can be 'described as a god proclaiming and manifesting himself as he is'.[7] Pseudo-Dionysius explains that "eternity" is a predicate of God because he is the cause of all eternity.[8] Aquinas states that God is not only eternal but 'is his own eternity' because God 'is his own essence'.[9] Anselm states that, because God is simple, he is identical with his attributes, meaning God is eternity.[10] However, if eternity is identified with God himself, then time is an overflow of God's very being, meaning that time, just like all other creaturely attributes, exist in God in its perfect form.[11] Thus, just as goodness in the world participates in God, who is goodness itself, so too we may say that time participates in God, who is time itself.

10.2   Eternity as "life": point-like and extensional models

Throughout the classical tradition, eternity is associated with "life" rather than simply abstract being. Nowhere is this more prominent than in Plotinus, who consistently identifies eternity with ζωή. This is most notably seen in his two definitions of eternity: 'the *life* [ζωή]…which belongs to that which exists and is in being, all

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5 Jenson, *God After God*, 76.

6 Barth, *KD* III/2, 525. [‚Höchst zeitlich, sofern eben seine Ewigkeit die eigentliche Zeitlichkeit und so der Ursprung aller Zeit ist'.]

7 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 5. 17–20.

8 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 198.

9 Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 2.

10 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 198.

11 Aquinas, *ST* I. 4. 2.

together and full, completely without extension or interval',[12] and '*life* [ζωή] which is here and now endless because it is total and expends nothing of itself, since it has no past or future' (emphasis added).[13] This identification is perpetuated by Boethius, who in his aforementioned definition of eternity describes it as 'a perfect possession altogether of an endless *life* [*vita*]'. Finally, Aquinas' belief that God alone is simple and that God alone is truly eternal likewise leads him to conceive of eternity as 'a mode of life proper only to a simple being'.[14]

This association of eternity with life has shaped the way God's relationship with time has been understood. Specifically, Leftow traces the presence of both "point-like" and "extensional" models in the patristic and medieval discussions of eternity, arguing that both models are legitimately and, in fact, *deliberately* present in the classical corpus. He agrees with Barth that Boethius' definition of eternity contains both elements – what Barth calls "*stare*" and "*fluere*" (see chapter six above) – observing that "altogether" suggests something instantaneous, while "endless" suggest something enduring forever in time.[15] However, contrary to Barth, Leftow argues that the medieval writers, following Boethius, correctly identify and faithfully reproduce this balance of both point-like and extensional elements in their own doctrines of eternity.[16] Thus, in Anselm's *Proslogion*, we find repeated juxtaposition of the two models. For example, Anselm states that God's eternity has no parts but rather 'exists as a whole', which clearly presents a point-like interpretation of eternity; however, in the very next sentence, he says of God that 'through your eternity, you were, you are and you will be', which conversely presents eternity as a mode of enduring.[17] The tension between the two models reaches its zenith in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* I. 10. 1, where in *ad* 1, 'Aquinas explicitly likens eternity to a point', before, in *ad* 2, arguing 'that eternity involves duration'.[18]

The reason for this combination of point-like and extensional models is that eternity 'defines a kind of *life* that could be enjoyed by a metaphysically *simple* being' (emphasis added).[19] Insofar as it is a type of life, eternity seems to demand some form of duration; however, insofar as it is the life specifically of a simple being, it seems necessarily partless and so point-like.[20] Leftow suggests that Boethius' recognition of these two "roots" of the doctrine of eternity – simplicity and life –

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12 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 3. 37–39.

13 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 5. 25–27.

14 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 192.

15 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 112–113.

16 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 191.

17 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 190–191.

18 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 191. See Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 1 ad 1, 2.

19 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 191–192.

20 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 191–192.

may have led him to combine both the point-like and extensional models when trying to understand eternity. While this may or may not have been a deliberate choice to provide a definition that could be interpreted via both models, it is clear that both models 'at least at some level influenced his choice of expressions'.[21]

Leftow explains that the corollary of the doctrine of simplicity is that God is identical with any perfections attributed to him. However, this conclusion has the unfortunate consequence of suggesting that God is himself merely an attribute or other 'abstract entity', making him 'appear impersonal and lifeless'.[22] This is reflected in the *Summa Theologiae*, where Aquinas admits that a simple God does appear to be abstract.[23] The implication is compounded by the fact that, as we have seen in chapter nine, simplicity also entails immutability, which makes God appear yet more abstract and lifeless because life as we experience it is intimately bound up in 'processes and changes'.[24] The question inevitably arises, therefore, as to how such a God can be alive, which was answered by the development of the doctrine of eternity: an explanation of 'just what sort of life a simple being can have'.[25]

10.3   Eternal duration

In their seminal work on the subject, the contemporary Thomists Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann argue that the combination of point-like and extensional models in Boethius' definition of eternity is an attempt to convey that eternity is a unique form of duration in which the whole is nevertheless present.[26] They contrast this to temporal life, in which the present is nothing more than a momentary boundary between an inaccessible past and future.[27] Leftow concurs, arguing that Boethius must see eternity as 'a form of duration' since he argues that the everlastingness of the universe is part of what makes it an imitation of eternity.[28]

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21 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 193.

22 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 193–196.

23 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 193–196. See Aquinas, *ST* I. 13. 1 *ad* 2.

24 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 196.

25 Leftow, 'Roots of Eternity', 202.

26 Davis, *Logic*, 17. See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Eternity', *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981): 445. This conclusion directly contradicts Alan Padgett's presupposed definition of eternity as the denial of any form of duration. We can see how this mistaken assumption that only the point-like model represents "absolute timelessness" leads him to misconstrue the presence of the extensional model alongside it as evidence of a competing doctrine of "relative timelessness" among the seminal proponents of classical eternity (see, for example, Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, 19, 43–44).

27 Davis, *Logic*, 18; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

28 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 119.

If eternity did not have duration, he reasons, the quality of everlastingness would in fact make the universe *less* like eternity, with a durationless temporal instant serving as a better analogue for eternity.[29]

Stump and Kretzmann believe that this "eternal duration" is actually the truest form of duration.[30] That is, they argue that our tendency to 'think of duration as duration through time' is erroneous, since this is in fact 'only apparent duration'.[31] They explain that, within time, neither the past nor the future exist at the present moment, meaning the ontological reality of time at any given point is nothing more than 'a durationless instant'.[32] By contrast, 'genuine duration' is 'existence <u>none</u> of which is already gone and <u>none</u> of which is yet to come'.[33] This follows Greek philosophy, which likewise defines duration as 'extended existence', which cannot exist in time.[34] Thus, Stump and Kretzmann argue that it is not eternity that lacks true duration but time: eternal duration 'is the genuine, paradigmatic duration of which temporal duration is only the moving image'.[35]

Davis rejects this claim, arguing along Wittgensteinian lines that duration must be, by definition, nothing other than what we have experience of in creation, namely 'the notion of existing through a series of sequentially related moments'.[36] On this basis, he claims that Stump and Kretzmann's appeal to an eternal form of duration is an unintelligible and thus ultimately meaningless concept designed to act as a *Deus ex machina*.[37] Yet we have seen above that there is a long tradition arguing that eternity is in fact the truest form of time, which lends credence to Stump and Kretzmann's position here. Their argument is qualitatively no different from that given in *Summa Theologiae* I. 13 for analogical predication of divine perfections which are named according to their imperfect images in creation. Thus, contrary to Davis' claim, there is still a common thread running between eternal and temporal duration despite the vast differences between the two, such that eternal "duration" is not simply meaningless equivocation.

While temporal things are present because a point in their 'temporal continuum' is present, eternal things are somehow entirely present. Leftow (whose analysis of eternal duration we will follow in this book) explains that, while eternity is,

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29 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 119.

30 Davis, *Logic*, 18; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

31 Davis, *Logic*, 18; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

32 Davis, *Logic*, 18; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

33 Davis, *Logic*, 18–19; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

34 Davis, *Logic*, 18–19; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

35 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 125; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald', *Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 4 (1987): 219.

36 Davis, *Logic*, 19.

37 Davis, *Logic*, 19.

like time, a continuum of earlier and later points, there is somehow no succession between these points. This means that earlier and later do not correspond to "no longer" (past) or "yet to come" (future), such that the eternal being 'lives at once'.[38] He calls this 'Quasi-Temporal Eternality' (QTE).[39]

Leftow turns to the question of how an eternal life can be extended if that which is eternal is also simple. He explains that while Boethius, Aquinas and the medieval Christian tradition more generally reject spatial parts and thus spatial extension for God, this does not mean they also deny temporal parts. His reasoning is that while an object is identical with its spatial parts, 'a thing's temporal parts compose not the thing itself, but its duration or life'.[40] Accordingly, while spatial parts necessarily entail the composite nature of the object, this is not the case for temporal parts. God having a duration is therefore not contradictory with God being simple, as long as the extent of that duration is not objectively divisible (that is, divisible into past, present and future, as in Barth's doctrine of eternity).[41]

Leftow gives the example of the philosophical idea of an "atom" (the smallest unit of matter into which all matter is irreducibly divided), which is itself spatially extended but which cannot be divided into smaller spatial parts, to argue that it is coherent to conceive of eternity as extended but nonetheless indivisible and thus simple.[42] An even more pointed analogy is that of a "chronon" (an indivisible unit of temporal duration into which all of time is irreducibly divided). Since a chronon has itself a duration, it is not an instant and, as such, must contain 'distinct temporal positions' that are 'ordered as earlier and later'.[43] Nevertheless, since it is the smallest conceivable duration, it cannot be subdivided into even more basic temporal parts. Moreover, despite the aforementioned ordering within it, its entire duration is present at once, since if part of the chronon were past and part future, 'this would constitute an objective division of the chronon into temporal parts'.[44] While Leftow recognizes that most philosophers and scientists do not actually believe time is made up of chronons, his point is that they do not dispute the coherence of the idea. Thus, since the features of the chronon notably mirror those of QTE, he argues the latter should also be accepted as logically possible.[45]

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38 With this denial of succession and tense distinctions in eternity, Leftow's notion of eternal duration is significantly different enough from that of Barth (see chapter six) to avoid the fundamental problems caused by the latter (see chapter seven). This will be noted in more detail below.

39 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 119–120.

40 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 135.

41 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 135–136.

42 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 140.

43 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 141.

44 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 141.

45 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 142.

To understand what it means to say that some points in eternity are earlier or later than others, Leftow proposes we conceive of them through the lens of logical ordering. For example, one might say that God engages in some acts timelessly as a result of timelessly hearing prayers. While this relation is causally ordered, it is not temporally ordered. Leftow argues that the earlier and later points in QTE correspond to 'the primary locus of a discrete divine mental act, some of which presuppose others'.[46] While 'all of these mental acts are God's simultaneously', nonetheless 'this relation between QTE points seems to deserve the name earlier-later'.[47]

10.4   Eternal movement

Despite the prominence of the point-like model in contemporary scholarship on the classical doctrine of eternity, the preceding two sections have demonstrated that the seminal discussions of the doctrine actually employed both point-like *and extensional* models. We have shown how these two models might intelligibly cohere via Leftow's concept of "Quasi Temporal Eternality", giving support to the concept of a duration that, unlike in Barth's theology, remains supremely simple without succession or tense distinctions. We have further argued that there are good grounds even to understand this as the truest form of duration. Bearing in mind these conclusions, it naturally follows that the inclusion of duration in eternity might open the door for the possibility of movement as well. In this section, we shall argue that eternity does indeed contain its own, eternal form of movement, and that, just as with duration, the archetype-image relationship between eternity and time suggests that this movement is in fact a more genuine sense of dynamism than that found in time.

The basic logic behind the denial of movement in eternity is found in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas argues that we can only understand eternity by examining the nature of time; however, he defines time following Aristotle as 'the numbering of movement by "before" and "after"'.[48] Accordingly, if time is inseparable from movement, and movement leads to succession, then a denial of succession in eternity must be by extension a denial of all movement in eternity, on the basis that a thing without any movement accordingly has no "before" or "after".[49] Aquinas' reliance on Aristotle here results in a conception of eternity as a supreme form of

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46 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 145.

47 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 145.

48 Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 1.

49 Aquinas, *ST* I. 10. 1.

"rest", consistent with the perception of Barth and Jenson that the classical doctrine renders God inert.

Yet it is prudent to note that Plotinus – who, as we have seen, was one of the original architects of the classical understanding of eternity – was adamant that time should not simply be identified with movement. He argues that movement is in fact 'in time', and 'that in which movement is, is something different from movement itself'.[50] He supports this by noting that 'movement can stop altogether or be interrupted, but time cannot'.[51] Plotinus is extremely critical of Aristotle's definition of time, arguing that, if time is the 'number' or 'measure' of movement, then it would be nothing more than a 'number made up of abstract units' such that one ends up not with time itself but merely the measure of 'a certain length of time'.[52] Further, Plotinus argues that time cannot be said to exist only when it is measured, since 'this is like saying that a magnitude would not be the size it is unless someone understood that it was that size'.[53] Thus, Plotinus concludes that time is a thing that is measured not the measurement itself.[54] Most importantly, Plotinus notes that not only movement but also rest is temporal; movement is just more closely associated with time because it gives us a better idea of what time is by analogy to it than rest does, and because 'it is easier to know how long something has been moving than how long it has stood still'.[55]

Nevertheless, even if we choose to follow Aristotle's definition of time over Plotinus', it is manifest that Aquinas has misconstrued Aristotle's intended meaning by concluding that eternity must be devoid of movement. In reality, Aristotle recognizes that time cannot simply to be identified with movement over against rest, arguing that 'since time is the measure of change, it will be the measure of rest also. For all rest is in time'.[56] Significantly, Aristotle goes on to say that, if time therefore measures both that which is in movement and that which is at rest, then what is eternal must transcend both movement *and rest*.[57]

This idea that eternity transcends both movement and rest is prominent throughout the classical tradition, where it is typically interpreted as the claim that God (and so being itself) transcends the boundary between these two categories, and hence that eternity is a form of rest that somehow includes movement (and vice-versa).

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50 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 8. 2–3, 4–6.

51 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 8. 7–8.

52 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 9. 43–46.

53 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 9. 74–76.

54 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 9. 81–82.

55 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 13. 6–10.

56 Aristotle, *Physics* IV, in *Aristotle's Physics*: Books III and IV, trans. Edward Hussey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 221b.

57 Aristotle, *Physics* IV, 221b.

As we noted in chapter nine, the attempt to reconcile rest and movement in being commenced with Plato's *Sophist*, 'in which the interlocutor from Elea struggles to understand how contraries such as rest and motion can be predicated of one and the same being and poses the question whether being would have to be regarded as transcending both of them'.[58] Developing from Plato, Plotinus argues that eternity cannot simply be the same as rest, since we modify the concept of rest by saying that it is "eternal rest", while we would conversely not speak of "eternal eternity" since this would clearly be a redundancy. Likewise, speaking of "eternal motion" would be a contradiction in terms.[59] It is for this reason that Plotinus argues 'we must think of eternity not only in terms of rest but of unity'.[60] While we should think of eternity as "participating" in rest, it is not 'absolute rest'.[61] Rather, eternity is called 'motion' insofar as it is '*life*' (emphasis added), and 'rest' 'in so far as it is always in every way unchangingly itself'.[62]

'Transposing the teachings of Plotinus into Christian terms, Gregory of Nyssa identifies rest and movement in the soul of the one invited into God's infinity'.[63] Thus, on the one hand, Gregory presents God saying to Moses, 'There is so much space in me that one rushing through it will never come to a stop', while on the other hand, he describes this movement as rest, presenting God saying to Moses, 'I shall place you on the rock'.[64] For Gregory, therefore, 'rest and motion are identical' in God.[65] Maximus the Confessor speaks, in a similar way, of 'motionless eternal movement surrounding God', and of 'eternally moving rest and restful constant movement'.[66] In

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58 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 67, n. 46. [‚Worin der das Gespräch führende Eleate zur Aporie hinführt, wie denn Gegensätzliches, eben Ruhe und Bewegung, vom identischen Sein ausgesagt werden könne, und die Frage aufwirft, ob denn das Sein über beides hinaus entrückt werden müßte‘.] See Plato, *Sophist*, in *Plato: Theaetetus/Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 248e.

59 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 2. 23–28.

60 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 2. 31–32.

61 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 2. 35–36.

62 Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7. 3. 9–10.

63 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 67, n. 46. [‚Die Lehre Plotins ins Christliche transponierend, identifiziert Gregor von Nyssa‘.] See Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe & Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), PG 44, 405BD.

64 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 67, n. 46. [„Wisse, sagt God zu ihr, daß es bei mir eine solche Fülle an Raum gibt, daß der ihn Durcheilende in seinem Flug nie innehalten wird‘“.] [„Ich werde dich auf den Felsen stellen‘“.] See Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, PG 44, 405BD.

65 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 67, n. 46. [‚Ruhe und Bewegung sind identisch‘.] See Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, PG 44, 405BD.

66 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 67, n. 46. [‚Von „bewegungsloser Ewigbewegung um Gott“ die Rede, oder auch von „ewigbewegter Ruhe und ruhevoller Dauerbewegung“‘.] See, Maximus the Confessor, *On difficulties in Sacred Scripture: the responses to Thalassios*, trans. Maximos Constas (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), PG 90, 760A.

a similar vein, Pseudo-Dionysius notably juxtaposes the idea that God is devoid of movement with the idea that God is always the same *despite* everlasting movement. He states that all of God's names that pick out his eternity 'refer to someone totally free of change and movement, someone who in his everlasting movement remains nonetheless in himself'.[67]

Moving to modern scholarship, the idea that God's eternity contains its own form of movement is particularly prominent in von Balthasar's engagement with this doctrine. Like us, he notes that the fact eternity is a form of "life" proves that it is 'not completely static but a perpetual vitality that is always new'.[68] In a similar vein to Pseudo-Dionysius, however, von Balthasar is quick to point out that 'of course, God does not "become" in the sense that creatures "become"'. In this regard, he quotes the 20th century Swiss mystic Adrienne von Speyr's statement that 'becoming in God is a confirmation of his being. And since God is immutable, the vitality of his 'becoming' can never be anything other than his being'.[69] This argument is notably reminiscent of Barth's understanding of the triune life as eternal repetition in an infinity of new forms; however, the classical understanding of this repetition presented by von Balthasar importantly does not conform to a problematic *chronological* structure.

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67 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), chapter 10, section 2.

    If we follow this line of argument within the Classical Transition that God possesses his own eternal form of movement, it is important to demonstrate that this does not contradict our conclusion from chapter nine that the prime mover is necessarily unmoved. Aquinas and Aristotle rightly deny *temporal* movement of the prime mover on the basis that such movement constitutes the actualization of a potential. Since this potential is not eliminated by the movement (i. e., an object that moves for a given duration and returns to rest retains the potential to be moved again), the *actus* denoted by this movement can only be 'imperfect' in character and thus alien to the concept of *actus purus* (Aquinas, *Commentary on Metaphysics* II, Book XI, Lesson 9, 2305). While the line of argument followed by this book agrees that the prime mover is at rest, it offers the additional nuance that this is not a temporal rest opposed to movement but an "eternal rest" that somehow includes its own distinct form of "eternal movement". We have argued that Aristotle himself recognizes this nuance in his metaphysics by asserting that the prime mover must be immobile while at the same time recognizing that eternity transcends rest as well as movement. It is the contention of this book, further, that Aquinas' theology also retains space for the possibility of such movement within the framework of *actus purus* as reflected in his postulate that, 'if some motion is eternal, that motion is not potential' (Aquinas, *Commentary on Metaphysics* II, Book IX, Lesson 9, 1874).

68 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 467. [‚Ewiges Leben ist, wie das Wort es schon sagt, kein Stillstand, sondern immerwährende Lebendigkeit, was ein Je-Neu-Sein einschließt'.]

69 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 468. [‚Natürlich „wird" Gott nicht in dem Sinne wie kreatürliches Sein wird. „Das Werden in Gott ist Bestätigung seines Seins. Auch weil Gott unveränderlich ist, kann die Lebendigkeit seines ‚Werdens' nie etwas anderes sein als sein Sein"'.] See Adrienne von Speyr, *Objektive Mystik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970), 105.

10.5   Eternal movement as triune perichoresis

That this eternal movement is specifically trinitarian in nature is drawn out by the contemporary German theologian Heinrich Beck. He explains that, for Plotinus, the One, is not 'enclosed in itself' but rather 'goes out of itself' and 'reflects upon itself' in the form of the 'self-knowing Mind'.[70] This Mind likewise 'overflows itself and thus produces the [spatio-temporal] material world' and hence the world Soul (of which all individual souls are made).[71] For Plotinus, the spatio-temporal nature of the Soul 'contradicts the original essential unity' of the One, resulting in suffering and leading to 'the yearning for a return to unity', which is achieved through love.[72] Accordingly, Plotinus follows the Aristotelian line we traced in chapter nine, understanding being as inherently engaged in activity – specifically, the activity of overflowing in 'three stages, which Plotinus describes as "*hypo-stases*"'.[73] He characterizes these hypostases as μόνη, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή (remaining, procession and return). Being first stands in itself in an 'unlimited unity', second goes out of itself and reflects upon itself in 'intellectual self-knowledge', and third returns to itself through 'purifying love' to attain reunification.[74] In this way, all being is engaged in a limitless and eternal 'efflux in knowledge' and 'reflux in love'.[75]

While, in Plotinus' scheme, the material world is 'a constitutive, essential component' of this eternal movement, Augustine argues that God's eternal reality is 'already complete in itself before the world even comes into existence'.[76] He thus identifies the first and second of Plotinus' hypostases with the Father and Logos, respectively, but argues that creation is a separate divine act '"embedded" in the procession of' the Logos.[77] Accordingly, while Augustine agrees with Plotinus that God projects his being in creation, he argues that he does so 'only to a limited extent', such that creation is only an imperfect and 'distant image' of God rather than the third divine hypostasis.[78] Augustine instead identifies this third hypostasis with the 'Holy Spirit, who streams forth as the loving union of the Father and the Son'.[79] For Augustine, therefore, God is, within himself, 'a tri-personal event' consisting of

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70 Heinrich Beck, 'Time as an 'Image of Eternity': A Philosophical Meditation', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 27, no. 4 (2000): 731.

71 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 731.

72 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 731.

73 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 731–732.

74 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 731–732.

75 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 731–732.

76 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 732–733.

77 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 733.

78 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 733.

79 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 733.

a 'circular movement of going out of self and going into self',[80] typically referred to as "perichoresis".

The idea that eternity is the origin and archetype of time is reflected in Beck's theology, which argues that eternity "pre-contains" 'all temporal reality in a non-temporal mode'.[81] He compares this to light refracted through a prism and so divided into a 'limited' spectrum of colours but which, prior to its passage through the prism, is 'undivided and unlimited in itself', such that 'the multiplicity of colours is pre-contained simply within the "pure light" from which it originates'.[82] Furthermore, in the same way that 'the question of the *origin*' of time points us to the eternal God as 'an existent that is *before* all time', he argues that 'the question of the *future*' likewise points us to the eternal God as 'an existent that is *after* all time'.[83] For Beck, therefore, eternity is 'time's encompassing creative origin, its sustaining ground, and its ultimately fulfilling end'.[84]

This conclusion has implications for how eternity is internally structured as well, since the assertion that the temporal originates from the eternal entails that 'the movement of procession' that characterizes time is also in the eternal.[85] 'This suggests that, in itself, the eternal is an unlimited movement of procession in which the temporal is embedded and in which it participates'.[86] Likewise, since 'the eternal is not only the origin of the temporal, but is equally its end', it follows that the eternal can only take the temporal into itself because it too, 'in its very essence', engages in a movement of 'return into itself'.[87] As such, Beck concludes that the true archetype of the dynamism that characterizes time is none other than the internal perichoresis of the divine life by which God engages in the movements of μόνη, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή. As an image of God, time merely 'shares in this pendular swing between procession and return' to a limited extent.[88] In this way, Plotinus and his Christian translation through Augustine depict eternity as a 'limitlessly full circular movement of procession from, and return to, itself', with the world's temporal dynamism as a limited sharing in or image of this movement.[89] Von Balthasar concurs, noting that, since eternal movement is the ground and

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80 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 733.

81 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 736.

82 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 736.

83 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 736.

84 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 738.

85 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 738.

86 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 738.

87 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 738.

88 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 733.

89 Beck, 'Image of Eternity', 738–739.

possibility of all becoming, it follows that 'innerworldly becoming' is merely 'an image of the eternal "happening" in God' that is 'identical with the eternal Being.'[90]

10.6   Eternity and the mechanics of the *analogia temporalis*

All of the conclusions made so far in this chapter have pointed inexorably in one direction: the *analogia temporalis*. We have first demonstrated that eternity, far from being "absolute timelessness", actually names the divine being as the truest form of time, in which our own "creaturely temporality" merely participates. This participatory framework has subsequently been accentuated in our conclusions that eternity contains both the archetypal forms and grounds of duration and movement – those two most characteristic features of creaturely time. In the immediately preceding section, we have identified the dynamism of eternity with triune perichoresis, arguing that this this circular efflux and reflux determines the structure of time as procession and return.[91] This strongly analogical relationship between eternity and time posited by the classical tradition naturally suggests that God's eternal movement *ad intra* has a temporal analogue in the form of a divine movement *ad extra*. Thus, if the structure of procession from and return to God that defines time is none other than the economy of salvation (i. e., creation from God for the purpose of being brought into fellowship with him in Christ), we can immediately recognize a direct link between the circular movement of the divine processions and the circular movement of the divine missions through which this economy is enacted. The remainder of the chapter shall be dedicated to exploring this classical interpretation of the *analogia temporalis*.

The first concrete reference to this form of analogy is found in *Summa Theologiae* I. 43, where Aquinas attempts to explain the assertion in John 8:16 that it is suitable for a divine person to be "sent". He argues that the dynamic of sending always implies a prior relationship of "procession" between the sender and the one sent, which may be according to command, counsel or origin. In the case of the divine persons, this is a procession of origin; hence, it is suitable for a divine person to be sent by the one from whom they have their origin.[92] This *analogia temporalis* was significantly taken up in the 20th century by the Canadian Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan, who explains that the sending of a divine person by another presupposes a real relation between them; however, since the only real relations in

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90 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 59. [‚Innerweltliches Werden ist ein Abbild des ewigen Geschehens in Gott, das als solches…identisch ist mit dem ewigen Sein oder Wesen'.]

91 This point notably parallels our conclusion in chapter nine that the act that in which God inherently engages is that of triune relationality.

92 Aquinas, *ST* I. 43. 1, 4.

the Trinity are relations of origin, it follows that a divine person can only be sent by the person or persons from whom they proceed.[93]

In a point of significant contrast to the *analogia temporalis* of Barth, Aquinas argues that the divine processions and mission do not just parallel one another but are 'simply one', with the perhaps unhelpful characterization of their relationship as "analogous" reflecting the conviction that the processions are the cause of the missions.[94] For Aquinas, therefore, it is more accurate to describe the divine missions as none other than an economic form of the divine processions themselves.[95] He makes this clear in his observation that the Holy Spirit is not just the love of the Father for the Son but also his love for creatures, meaning that the same procession of divine love has two aspects: it goes outwards to an eternal beloved (as an eternal procession) and to a created beloved (as a temporal mission). From this it follows that procession and mission are one and the same for the Trinity.[96]

This key difference between the classical and Barthian *analogiae temporales* is thus a direct result of the doctrines of eternity within which they are located. Unlike that of Barth, which divides the divine processions and missions into pre-temporality and supra-temporality, respectively, we have seen that the classical doctrine of eternity instead sees all of God's actions, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*, as simultaneous in the immanent triune life. This opens up the possibility of identifying the triune missions with the triune processions themselves, overcoming the separation between God's primordial reality and act of incarnation that leads to Barth's *analogia temporalis* becoming in essence a means to *transcend* revelation in search of a grounding divine reality behind it. In our classical explication, by contrast, christological revelation is in no way transcended because the pursuit of the eternal immanent reality to which it points is fundamentally the attempt to understand the event of revelation itself more fully.[97]

Von Balthasar offers a particularly thorough engagement with this aspect of Aquinas' argument, emphasizing that the Son's eternal procession is identical with his mission. In this regard, he appeals to von Speyr, who states that 'the will of the

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93 Robert M. Doran, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions, Volume 1: Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 45–46.

94 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 54. [„Schlechthin eins".] See Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952), 2. 6 ad 3.

95 Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik: Zweiter Band – Die Personen Des Spiels; Teil 2 – Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978), 158.

96 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 54–55. See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum: Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*: Tomus 1, ed. R. P Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), I, d 14, q 1, a 1 sol, I, d 15, q 1, a 1 sol and I, d 15, q 4, a 1 sol.

97 This point notably separates the *analogia temporalis* as explicated within a classical doctrine of eternity from that proposed by even the most traditional readings of Barth's theology, such as that defended by Hunsinger.

Father to beget [the Son] and to send him into the world constitutes together only one single will. To proceed forth and to come are thus for the Son one single action and movement: the internal and the external sendings are one'.[98] The contemporary American Jesuit Robert Doran's extended examination of the *analogia temporalis* in his two-volume work, *The Trinity in History*, arrives at the same conclusion from the argument that nothing other than the eternal divine procession of the Son from the Father is required to constitute the divine mission of the Son in the incarnation. His logic is that the Father-Son relation is immanent in God and it is inconceivable that anything more than the infinite divine perfection could be required to constitute anything that is a function of that relation. He concludes that this means the mission of the Son simply *is* the procession of the Son.[99]

While Doran thus asserts that the divine missions are constituted by divine relations of origin alone, he nevertheless follows Lonergan in arguing that they still 'demand an appropriate external term as a consequent condition'.[100] Such a created, temporal consequence is required because the processions are eternal while their new modes in the missions are temporal.[101] As such, the truth of the divine missions is contingent on the consequent existence of this term – which, in the case of the incarnation, is the human nature of Jesus – just as the truth that God creates the universe is contingent on the consequent existence of the universe. Such contingent truths are to be contrasted with absolute truths about God, such as his triunity, which conversely have no external consequent conditions.[102]

10.7 Triune generation as the eternal basis for Godforsakenness, suffering and sin

Further emphasizing the role of the divine immanent reality as the ground for the economy, von Balthasar argues that the condition for temporal creation was the eternal generation of the Son. He explains that the difference found in creation is only possible because of the differentiation within the Trinity, on the basis that there

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98 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 70–71. [„Der Wille des Vaters, ihn hervorzubringen und ihn in die Welt zu senden, bilden zusammen nur einen einzigen Willen. Ausgehen und Kommen sind also für den Sohn eine einzige Handlung und Bewegung: die innere und die äußere Sendungen sind eins".] See Adrienne von Speyr, *Johannes II: Die Streitreden* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1949), 199.

99 Doran, *Trinity in History* 1, 50.

100 Doran, *Trinity in History* 1, 42–43.

101 Jeremy D. Wilkins, 'Trinitarian Missions and the Oder of Grace According to Thomas Aquinas', in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages*, ed. Kent Emery Jr., Russel L. Friedman and Andreas Speer (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 690–691. See Aquinas, *ST* I. 43. 2, esp. ad 2, 3; I. 45. 2 ad 2.

102 Doran, *Trinity in History* 1, 42–43.

is nothing outside of God from which this difference could otherwise come.[103] As such, von Balthasar argues that 'space has its primal origin in the Trinity in the form of the persons of the Trinity giving space to one another'.[104]

This argument originated in High Scholasticism and is represented by Aquinas in his statement in the *Summa Theologiae* that 'the entire triune God is active in creation' and creates 'according to the order of Persons within the Godhead'.[105] That is, God the Father creates by his Word, the Son, and by his Love, the Holy Spirit; hence, it is the eternal processions of these persons that underpin the temporal generation of creatures possessing the attributes of knowing and willing.[106] He further argues that the generation of the Son from the Father is the foundation of all creaturely generation, because the Son alone possesses the entire nature of the one from whom he is generated, while other births only do this in an imperfect manner. Thus, all births in creation are derived from this "primal birth" and can be said to "imitate" it.[107]

For von Balthasar, however, God's triune differentiation does not underpin creation alone but, paradoxically, even the very acts of sin and Godforsakenness that seem antithetical to him. He reasons that 'the condition for the possibility of Jesus being forsaken by the Father must consist in the absolute intratrinitarian distance between the hypostasis who surrenders the Godhead and the hypostasis who receives it'.[108] Accordingly, von Balthasar comes to the startling conclusion that this temporal Godforsakenness can be subsumed into the eternal intratrinitarian relation as merely a created expression of this relation. He explains that the Father's act of generating the Son entails him giving his divinity to the Son, implying 'an incomprehensible and unsurpassable "separation" of God from himself' 'within which can occur all other distances that are possible within the finite world, up to and including sin'.[109]

This is because there is inherent in the Father's love an absolute self-renunciation, since he is no longer God for himself alone. Therefore, he lets go of his divinity,

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103 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IIII, 310–311. [,Da die Welt keinen andern „Ort" haben kann als innerhalb der Differenz der Hypostasen'.]

104 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 82. [,Was das Moment des Raumes angeht, so liegt seine trinitarische Uridee im Raum als Freigeben'.]

105 Aquinas, *ST* I. 45. 6.

106 Aquinas, *ST* I. 45. 6.

107 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 54.

108 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 320. [,Daß die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Verlassenheit Jesu vom Vater in der innertrinitarischen absoluten Distanz zwischen der die Gottheit hingebenden und der sie empfangenden Hzpostases beruhen muß'.]

109 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 300–303. [,Eine so unfaßbare und unüberbietbare „Trennung" Gottes von sich selbst'.] [,Innerhalb dessen alle möglichen andern Abstände, wie sie innerhalb der endlichen Welt bis einschließlich zur Sünde hin auftreten können'.]

and in this sense there occurs a form of (divine) Godlessness (albeit one of love). While this is of course not to be confused with the godlessness found in the world, von Balthasar argues that it 'nonetheless undergirds [the latter's] possibility and goes beyond it'.[110] Therefore, in the incarnation, the eternal 'divine Father-Son distance' is translated into the temporal 'christological God-man distance'.[111] This distance between the Father and the Son is eternally confirmed and maintained by the Spirit, who proceeds from them, but it is also transcended in the divine nature that comprises 'the absolute gift they have in common'.[112] Thus, 'during the passion, the Spirit maintains the internal divine diastasis between Father and Son in its economic [temporal] shape', establishing union in this separation without abolishing the separation itself.[113] In this way, the supreme revelation of the triune distinction is at the same time the greatest sign of their unity of being.[114]

This link between the eternal processions and the Godforsakenness of the cross traced by von Balthasar implies, further, that the processions also stand as the archetype for the various events of kenosis that characterize Jesus' mission yet seem to push his divinity to the absolute limit. The natural tendency in theology (as represented most prominently by the classical tradition) is to locate such events of temporal kenosis exclusively in the humanity of Jesus or his act of assuming that humanity, on the basis that the eternal divine nature is immune to all change. However, von Balthasar recognizes that this solution risks underplaying the assertions made in Scripture and succumbing to Nestorianism or Monophysitism. As such, von Balthasar argues that we must relate the temporal kenosis of the Son to the eternal divine processions, and so to the very heart of the triune life. He explains that Father's self-giving to the Son 'makes himself 'destitute' of all that he is and can be so as to bring forth a consubstantial divinity', accordingly terming this event an eternal 'super-kenosis'.[115]

This line of reasoning culminates in von Balthasar's supposition that even the suffering of the cross constitutes merely a temporal manifestation of what happens in the eternal divine life; and hence there must be 'in God the starting point for what

110 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 301. [‚Die aber doch deren Möglichkeit (überholend) grundlegt'.]

111 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 108. [‚Nur muß sich jetzt die göttliche Distanz Vater-Sohn übersetzen in die christliche Distanz Gott-Mensch'.]

112 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 310. [‚Der gemeinsamen, absoluten Gabe'.]

113 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 237. [‚Der Geist hält während der Passion die innergöttliche Diastase zwischen Vater und Sohn in ihrer ökonomischen Gestalt aufrecht'.] See Adrienne von Speyr, *Johannes III: Die Abschiedsreden* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1948), 358 and von Speyr, *Johannes II*, 381–382.

114 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 237.

115 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), vii–viii.

can become suffering'.[116] Von Balthasar identifies this as the eternal 'recklessness' of the Father's self-giving to the Son, which becomes temporal suffering when it encounters a freedom in creation 'that does not answer this recklessness but transforms it into the caution of self-preservation'.[117] It is in this way that the positive Godlessness of the eternal triune life becomes in time the negative godlessness of sin. Yet, it remains that humanity's refusal of God was only possible on the basis of the archetypal recklessness of the intratrinitarian love, which has no limits and no self-regard.[118]

10.8   The *analogia temporalis* as a *via media*

Von Balthasar is aware that, 'just as the divine immutability makes a real and intrinsic addition to God impossible, so also the divine infinity makes it superfluous'.[119] Nevertheless, his reasoning up to this point impels him to the conclusion that 'the full undiminished divinity of God is at work' in Jesus' death on the cross, 'from which one cannot keep out the 'divine nature''.[120] He argues that the only way to reconcile these seemingly opposed convictions is to refute the traditional conception of divine immutability represented by the classical tradition. In this way, 'christology must take seriously the fact that, in the Son, God himself really enters into suffering', while remaining entirely God and in fact being most truly God in this act.[121]

Von Balthasar recognizes that this leads us down a narrow path in which we must both defend divine immutability (which asserts that in the pre-mundane Logos nothing real took place) and prevent the assertion of a "real event" in God degenerating into theopaschism. He argues this is accomplished by seeing 'the immanent Trinity as the ground of the world process (right up to the crucifixion)' and hence as the absolute love that grounds all expressions of love in the economy

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116 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 305. [‚In Gott ist der Ansatzpunkt für das, was Leiden werden kann'.] See Adrienne von Speyr, *Die Bergpredigt: Betrachtungen über Matthäus 5–7* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1948), 229.

117 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 305. [‚Die diese Vorsichtslosigkeit nicht beantwortet, sondern, in die Vorsicht des Bei-sich-selber-beginnen-Wollens verwandelt'.]

118 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 305–306.

119 Doran, *Trinity in History* 1, 48–49.

120 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 38. [‚Aus der man keine ‚göttliche Natur' heraushalten darf, waltet die volle ungeminderte Gottheit Gottes'.]

121 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 38. [‚Die Christologie muß Ernst damit machen, daß Gott selbst in dem Sohn wirklich in das Leiden eintritt'.]

of salvation; yet without this meaning that God needs the world process in order to fully actualize himself.[122]

The crucial argument underlying von Balthasar's solution is that God does not need to change in his acts of incarnation and passion because, as we have seen above, all such contingent acts of kenosis in the economy of salvation are both included and outstripped in the eternal event of the divine processions.[123] In this way, von Balthasar's deployment of the *analogia temporalis* calls for a radical re-conceptualisation of the way we see God. In contrast to the God of the Old Testament, for whom sharing his glory and honour with another would be self-contradiction, Philippians 2 describes a God with the freedom to renounce his glory and even to become an obedient slave. We may conclude, therefore, that '[God] is not primarily "absolute power", but absolute "love", [and his] sovereignty manifests itself not in holding on to what is its own but in giving it up'.[124]

This means that, in his act of lowering himself to become a servant and submitting himself to the wretchedness of humanity, 'God does not denounce his divinity' but rather "confirms" it.[125] On the other hand, however, von Balthasar's argument does not mean 'that God's essence is in itself (univocally) "kenotic", such that a single comprehensive concept could summarize both the divine foundation of the possibility of kenosis and the kenosis itself'.[126] What it does mean is that the divine being is structured in such a way as to make room for the possibility of the kenosis found in the economy of salvation, even to the point of Jesus' death and descent to hell. Von Balthasar argues that this allows two propositions: First, that of John's Gospel that the Son's glory breaks through most significantly when he takes on the most radical form of a slave, namely on the cross, since it is at this point that he most radically expresses the divine being as love. Second, that the incarnation not only facilitates the salvation of the world but also discloses God himself in a way that is deeply appropriate to his immanent reality.[127]

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122 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* III, 300. [‚Die immanente Trinität so als den Grund des Weltprozesses (bis hin zur Kreuzigung)‘.]

123 Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, viii–ix.

124 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 32–33. [‚Der nicht primär „absolute Macht", sondern absolute „Liebe" ist, dessen Souveränität nicht im Festhalten des Eigenen, sondern in seiner Preisgabe sich kundtut‘.]

125 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 79. [‚Gott entschlägt sich...nicht seiner Gottheit‘.]

126 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 33. [‚Daß Gottes Wesen in sich (univok) „kenotisch" sei, daß also das göttliche Fundament der Möglichkeit der Kenose mit dieser selbst unter einen umfassenden Begriff zusammengefaßt werden könnte‘.]

127 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 33–34.

10.9 The response of the Son and Holy Spirit: "consent" as reciprocal kenosis

To explain why the acts of obedience exhibited by Jesus in the economy of salvation are not foreign to God, it is crucial to make reference to his intratrinitarian love, recognizing that the eternal relationship between the Father who commands and the Son who humbly obeys is the same dynamic expressed in the divine work of reconciliation.[128] Von Balthasar appeals to the fact that the Son's obedience to the Father is not just subsequent to the incarnation, but actually begins with the decision to become incarnate itself, meaning that the obedience that characterizes Jesus' life must have an immanent archetype.[129]

Further, the Son's acceptance of the mission cannot have been the result of persuasion, but must have been made spontaneously by him. As such, while we say that everything is begun and initiated by the Father, it is also true that the divine initiative is the result of a 'primordial simultaneity' between the Father and the Son in the unreserved agreement of 'wholehearted love'.[130] In the economy, this is represented by the fact 'that the one who is sent, who in obedience lets the Father do his fatherly work in him, also does his filial works in himself: *he* consummates his Father's works (Jn 10:37), *he* gives himself up in love for the many and also for every individual (Gal 2:20), *he* distributes himself in his Eucharist'.[131] This means that we should not consider the incarnation to be the result of the Father alone being "offended" by sin and deciding unilaterally for the Son to restore creation through the cross. On the contrary, the Son's self-offering is just as basic to the Incarnation, and when the immanent Trinity is projected onto history as the economic Trinity, it is this free "correspondence" of the Son to the Father that takes on the form of "obedience".[132]

Nonetheless, von Balthasar emphasizes that Jesus does not execute the plan of the triune God (where the subject of election is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in union) but rather the plan of the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this way, he accentuates the obedience of the Son and hence the way christological revelation provides knowledge of the immanent intratrinitarian relationship. At the same time,

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128 Von Balthasar, *Theologie Der Drei Tage*, 79–80. See Barth, *KD* IV/1, 221–222.

129 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 168, 171–172.

130 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 473. [,Aus uranfänglicher Gleichzeitigkeit und in der vorbehaltlosen Übereinstimmung der vollkommenen Liebe'.]

131 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 475–476. [,Daß der Gesendete, der im Gehorsam den Vater seine väterlichen Werke in ihm tun läßt, auch seine sohnlichen in sich tut: *er* vollbringt die Werke seines Vaters (Joh 10, 37), *er* gibt sich in Liebe für die Vielen dahin und auch für jeden Einzelnen (Gal 2, 20), *er* verteilt sich selbst in seiner Eucharistie'.]

132 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 172, 175.

von Balthasar denies that we therefore have no knowledge of the original divine decision to send the Son by explaining that the Son did not first make a decision in eternity as God and then a subsequent decision in time as human. Rather, 'the Son's eternal decision includes his temporal decision, and the temporal decision embraces his eternal decision'.[133] By virtue of this *analogia temporalis*, the decision we are faced with in the economy is not some isolated choice of the human Jesus to be obedient to God in time, but rather the incarnate Son's renewed embrace of the Father's will to which he has always consented.[134]

The logical endpoint of this argument is that the Son's free consent to the Father's decision finds its ultimate ground not in the beginning of the divine works *ad extra* but in the intratrinitarian relationship itself, and hence in the eternal begetting of the Son by which this relationship is codified. The coherence of this conclusion is secured through von Balthasar's use of a broadly classical doctrine of eternity, in which the sequential ordering of the processions are understood to be so absolutely atemporal that the Son and Holy Spirit can be considered to actually "let themselves be brought forth".[135] Thus, the counterpart in the Son to the eternal self-giving of the Father 'is a letting happen that is just as eternal'.[136] Von Balthasar goes further still, arguing that, through this act of letting himself be begotten, the Son can even be said to *co-operate* in his begetting.[137]

The identification of the temporal kenosis and suffering of Jesus Christ with an eternal, immanent archetype inevitably raises the question of whether the latter simply exists in God in a generic sense, by virtue of the Father's kenotic and reckless self-giving that we detailed in the previous section, or whether there is a sense in which the immanent Son is himself the subject of kenosis in the eternal *intratrinitarian* life. To argue for the latter would facilitate a more direct analogy to Jesus' historical acts of kenosis in the incarnation and passion; furthermore, as von Balthasar notes, this argument in fact enjoys considerable support within the Christian tradition.

Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria established a precedent for arguing that the second person of the Trinity himself suffers on the cross, with the latter even claiming that it is essential to Christianity to assert that the Word himself

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133 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 182. [‚Die ewige Entscheidung des Sohnes schließt seine zeitliche in sich ein, und die zeitliche ergreift seine ewige'.]

134 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 183.

135 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik: Zweiter Band – Wahrheit Gottes* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 126.

136 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 74–75. [‚Ein Geschehenlassen, das ebenso ewig ist'.]

137 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 75–76.

'suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and in the flesh tasted death'.[138] That the suffering of the cross applies to the second person of the Trinity (not the Trinity as a whole) was codified by Pope John II and Emperor Justinian. Building on this tradition, von Balthasar reasons that, if the divine Son can accept this suffering as his own, then clearly suffering is not foreign to him or something that has no effect on his divine life. This is because, as aforementioned, von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* understands the mission of the Son to be fundamentally a temporal modality of his eternal procession from the Father. As such, the suffering and death of Jesus in the flesh does not merely signal the compatibility of God *in se* with suffering and death (as in Barth) but comprises the suffering and death of the divine Son on the economic level (according to the flesh) as the temporal manifestation of one and the same eternal suffering and death of the immanent Son.[139]

Von Balthasar explains that the Son responds to the Father's self-giving in the act of begetting with his own self-giving that constitutes 'something like a "death"'.[140] Von Balthasar terms this a 'super-death', which he sees as the archetype and basis in all creation for the concept of a "good death" of giving up one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13).[141] While acknowledging that "death" in the sense of an end can, of course, in no way be in God, since the divine eternal life is unending, he observes that if we consider death in the broader sense of a 'sacrifice of life', then the archetype of that sacrifice *can* be found in God.[142] At the same time, however, he makes clear that 'the death of sin is a completely other, antithetical death', since it is conversely the result of humanity *closing itself off* from the possibility of self-surrender and hence eternal life.[143] For von Balthasar, the Son's mission was to integrate this death of sin into the divine living death and so dissipate the former, which entailed that the Son suffer a death involving Godforsakenness.[144]

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138 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 207–208. [‚Im Fleisch gelitten und im Fleisch gekreuzigt und im Fleisch den Tod geschmeckt‘.]

139 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 208.

140 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 74. [‚So etwas wie einen „Tod"‘.]

141 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 74. [‚Einen Über-Tod‘.]

142 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 226. [‚„Hingabe des Lebens"‘.] See Adrienne von Speyr, *Johannes I: Das Wort wird Fleisch* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2004), 42–43.

143 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 226. [‚Ein „ganz anderer, entgegengesetzter Tod ist der Tod der Sünde"‘.] See von Speyr, *Johannes I*, 43–44.

144 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 226–227.

10.10   Divine freedom in the *analogia temporalis*: between freedom and caprice

Erich Przywara says of the *analogia entis* that it is not an analogy into which God is "compelled", but rather just one particular analogy ordained by God among countless potential others. As such, the creaturely reality through which God reveals himself is in no way 'a "necessary" revelation of his nature and activity or a limitation of new ways of his self-revelation'.[145] Przywara's statement here holds equally for the *analogia temporalis*: the existence of the human Jesus Christ is an expression of divine freedom rather than necessity, meaning God can never be said to have been compelled to take this particular form. While the Son's temporal mission is a true analogue of his eternal begetting, it cannot encapsulate the latter since there can be many possible analogies of one and the same thing; hence, divine freedom is maintained alongside the reliability of christological revelation.[146] Further, since Przywara reminds us that any analogy involving God conforms to the Fourth Lateran Council's formula that every 'similarity, however great', presupposes an 'ever greater dissimilarity', we may be confident that the *analogia temporalis* in no way abolishes God's distance *in se* from creation in such a way as to infringe upon the divine freedom.[147]

Przywara emphasizes that the creaturely sphere only has being and truth because 'it is related, beyond itself', to the divine sphere, giving an objective priority to the latter.[148] Von Balthasar concurs, noting that while we approach the *analogia*

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145 John R. Betz, 'Translator's Introduction', in Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 97.

146 It seems necessary, absolutely speaking, to accept that the incarnation could have had at least *some* differences of content from its historical reality. To deny this would be to evacuate the biblical narrative of all drama by forcing us to advocate a rigid determinism pertaining not only to every aspect of Jesus' life but also to that of everyone with whom he interacts. This would, by extension, unacceptably undermine key moral implications of those interactions; for example, Judas' betrayal of Jesus or the woman with the haemorrhage's display of faith by touching Jesus' clothes. The *analogia temporalis* conversely allows us to argue that the incarnation could have had an alternative content but that, since this counterfactual content would still have been an analogue of God's immanent triunity, the divine identity discerned from it would always have been the same, protecting the reliability of revelation. Nonetheless, this book concurs with Barth that we must respect the actual content of revelation as the sole appropriate expression of God's immanent reality to avoid depicting this content as a mere "choice" between equal options. As such, any counterfactuals proposed must remain only bare possibilities rather than fleshed out alternate realities, each corresponding to a different God than the God of revelation (i. e., whose act, and hence being-in-act reality, would be different).

147 Pryzwara, *Analogia Entis*, 234.

148 Pryzwara, *Analogia Entis*, 212–214.

temporalis from below – in the flesh of Jesus, through which we see the Logos, and from the Logos, the Father to whom the Logos belongs – this analogy must also be able to be read from above downwards to avoid a Feuerbachian critique that God is merely humanity writ large. As such, the *analogia temporalis* must always fundamentally be understood as instituted by God in an act of expositing himself from above, rather than as the man Jesus explaining God from below. Accordingly, while the divine term is not related to the creaturely as though the former needed the latter, the creaturely term cannot be valid if it is not intrinsically related to the divine.[149]

In this way, von Balthasar clarifies his previous assertion that the economic Trinity is none other than a modality of the immanent, explaining that this is specifically because the structure of the economic Trinity arises from the immanent Trinity, meaning the two cannot be regarded as simply identical.[150] This is an important point since 'otherwise the immanent, eternal Trinity would threaten to dissolve into the economic', and 'God would be swallowed up in the world process' in the course of fully realizing himself, as in Jenson's theology.[151] One expression of why the immanent and economic Trinities cannot simply be collapsed together is that God 'does not *become* "love"' through his loving relationship with the world; rather, in himself 'he "is love" already'. It is only in this way – because he can therefore act 'in freedom' – that God can 'reveal himself and give himself to be loved'.[152]

Von Balthasar summarizes that we cannot claim God actualizes himself through involvement with creation, that he needs creation or that God's goodness overflows inherently such that it has to communicate itself as the act of creation. At the same time, we also cannot claim that God creates in order to procure his own *accidental* glorification by leading creation to share in his blessedness. While the ultimate goal of creation is indeed the divine glorification, von Balthasar argues this can only be understood through the lens of God's triunity, according to which this external glorification is always grounded in the gratuitous (and thus loving) character of the triune processions.[153] However, since 'the gratuitousness of creation is founded on the much more fundamental gratuitousness of the inner divine life', we are also able to avoid the implication that creation is completely superfluous to God such

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149 Von Balthasar, *Theologik* II, 285–286.

150 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 143.

151 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 465–466. [‚Andernfalls droht die immanente und ewige Trinität Gottes in der ökonomischen aufzugehen, klarer gesagt, Gott in den Weltprozeß hinein verschlungen zu werden'.]

152 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 466. [‚Der nicht erst dadurch „die Liebe" wird, daß er die Welt als sein „Du" und „Gegenüber" hat, sondern in sich selber und erhaben über alle Welt schon „die Liebe ist". Nur so kann er sich selber in Freiheit offenbaren und zu liebe geben'.]

153 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 463–464.

that it can only be understood as an act of caprice that is unable to tell us anything about God himself.[154]

A major reason for thinking that God actualizes himself through action *ad extra* is that the characterization of the economic Trinity as a temporal modality of the immanent Trinity implies the former was a latent capacity or "potentiality" in God waiting to be fulfilled. We find this implication in Barth's theology, where he speaks of God's "readiness for time" being "actualized" in the incarnation. Yet, this manifestly cannot be what Aquinas had in mind when he first proposed the *analogia temporalis*, not only because this would tie God to the world but also because it would contradict Aquinas' key characterization of God as *actus purus*. For Aquinas, a divine mission 'is not a matter of potentiality being actualised, but rather of the procession itself now having a created term. It is the same act in a different mode'.[155] It is because Barth is unable to make this same assertion – since, as aforementioned, the incarnation he proposes is clearly separated from God's primordial acts of triune relationality and election – that he is forced to resort to language of "actualization".

10.11   Responding to critiques of von Balthasar

In recent years, von Balthasar's theology has faced substantial criticism from the American systematic theologians Linn Marie Tonstad and Karen Kilby. The use of von Balthasar's theology in this book is limited to the resources his *analogia temporalis* offers to solve the epistemology-freedom debate and does not necessarily constitute an advocation of his theology in abstract. Nevertheless, it shall be prudent to address those criticisms pertaining to aspects of his argument relied on in this chapter to defend the use of this theologian as a key interlocutor. Since both Tonstad and Kilby's criticisms follow broadly the same pattern, the treatment in this section will focus on Kilby's presentation, in which the argument is more extensively and forcefully put forward, on the grounds that my subsequent response will address both theologians.[156]

Kilby begins by noting that, while traditional trinitarian discourse sees the self-gift of the Father to the Son as entailing the inseparability of the persons, von

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154 Von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* IV, 464. [‚Die Gratuität der Schöpfung wird in der viel fundamentaleren Gratuität des innergöttlichen Lebens fundiert'.]

155 Eugene R. Schlesinger, 'Trinity, incarnation and time: a restatement of the doctrine of God in conversation with Robert Jenson', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69, no. 2 (2016): 201–202. See Aquinas, *ST* I. 43. 2.

156 For Tonstad's critique of von Balthasar, see Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. 29–39.

Balthasar surprisingly understands this self-gift to emphasize 'the infinite difference or separation of the Persons'.[157] Kilby argues that this move is 'highly tentative and rather precarious' for three reasons.[158]

First, von Balthasar's argument presupposes that we understand the passion narrative 'as most fundamentally a drama of abandonment of Christ by the Father'.[159] While Kilby acknowledges that this is indeed a common line of interpretation, she takes issue with the way von Balthasar takes it as self-evident. She notes, for example, the lack of consensus over whether Jesus' so-called "cry of dereliction" is actually an expression of abandonment by the Father or a quotation of Psalm 22 and hence ultimately an affirmation of faith. Further, she observes that, even if we accept the former reading and accept that Jesus *felt* abandoned by the Father, it does not necessarily follow that 'what is most fundamentally being depicted and played out *is* in fact the abandonment of Jesus by the Father'.[160]

Second, von Balthasar extrapolates that, if the cross is indeed fundamentally about the abandonment of the Son by the Father, and if this abandonment does not introduce anything *new* to the triune life, 'then we are bound to suppose that there is *something* eternally present in the life of the Trinity which anticipates it, something to which it gives expression'.[161] That is, he presents it as an inexorable conclusion that 'the eternal Trinitarian relations are characterized by infinite, absolute distance, radical otherness, separation' in eternity.[162] In doing so, however, von Balthasar controversially assumes that it is possible to deduce from the drama of the cross backwards 'to the eternal conditions of its possibility', and in so doing distinguish which elements of the passion narrative are intramundane and which reveal the eternal life of the Trinity.[163]

Third, it is not at all clear what it means to talk of "infinite distance" within the Trinity. While Rowan Williams proposes we translate von Balthasar's term *abstand* as "difference", to overcome the problematic spatial implications of "distance", Kilby responds that the only difference von Balthasar proposes is that the Father gives while the Son receives; however, this is undermined by von Balthasar's claim that the Son engages in an equal event of kenosis in response to the self-giving of the Father. Kilby thus concludes that the concept of "infinite distance/difference" is unintelligible when applied to the Trinity, and hence that it is used by von Balthasar

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157 Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) critical introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 99–100.

158 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 107, 109.

159 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 107.

160 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 107–108.

161 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 108, 111.

162 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 108.

163 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 108–109.

as nothing more than a placeholder to pick out an eternal "something"" in the triune life that anticipates the intratrinitarian dynamic supposedly presented by the cross. In this case, however, Kilby argues that use of the term *abstand* is ultimately unjustified, since it provides no discernible meaning.[164]

These three criticisms emphasize the tenuous nature of von Balthasar's logical progression, which Kilby argues makes it all the more 'striking' just how confidently von Balthasar presents his argument. Kilby believes von Balthasar is guilty of excessive speculation regarding the intratrinitarian relationship, accusing him of acting less like a theologian and 'more like a novelist who, with a particular understanding of the Cross as a starting point, freely fills out background, adds character details, construct prior scenes ("a primal drama")…to make the central point plausible, powerful, effective'.[165]

The consequence of von Balthasar's argument is that suffering, self-abasement and sacrifice of self are linked to love and obedience, and so cast in a positive light as 'essential, constitutive, defining components of Christian faith and life'.[166] While this is again a tendency found in various strands of the Christian tradition, Kilby argues that von Balthasar's importation of this link into the eternal intratrinitarian life goes significantly further and has the serious consequence of 'fundamentally blurring the distinction between love and loss, joy and suffering'.[167] She explains that, 'if love and renunciation, suffering and joy, are linked, not just in the Christian life, but eternally in God, then ultimately suffering and loss are given a positive valuation: they are eternalized, and take on an ultimate ontological status. And then, it seems to me, it becomes hard to understand how Christianity can possibly be "good news"'.[168]

Kilby's criticisms of von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* raise several important questions about both the validity and the implications of this theological principle. Her analysis demonstrates not only a nuanced understanding of von Balthasar's theology but also an impressive command of the wider tradition with which it engages. Nevertheless, her argument at key points fails to capture the overarching spirit of von Balthasar's theological enterprise, resulting in unfair criticisms, as I shall demonstrate below.

First, Kilby has notably misunderstood the German term *Abstand* as it is used in von Balthasar's theology. Williams' translation of this term as "difference" rather than the more obvious terms "distance" or "separation" is designed to preclude the interpretation that von Balthasar is applying spatial categories to God. However,

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164 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 111.

165 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 114.

166 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 115–117.

167 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 119–120.

168 Kilby, *Balthasar*, 120.

Kilby assumes based on this that it must refer to a *qualitative* difference – that which makes the Father different in character from the Son. If this were indeed von Balthasar's meaning, he would almost certainly have used the generic German term for difference, *Unterschied*. The fact von Balthasar uses the term *Abstand*, however, demonstrates that he is referring specifically to an *otherness* between the first and second persons – that which makes the Father a "separate" person from the Son. As Tonstad herself notes, this separateness is understandable in the Trinity insofar as it is the very presupposition of loving relationality: that the lover is other than oneself.[169] Thus, contra Kilby, it is not necessary for the affirmation of *Abstand* in the Trinity that only the Father gives or only the Son receives. Rather, the Father and the Son can both give and receive but, in this very act, they show themselves to be distinct persons that can thereby relate to one another through the dynamic of giving and receiving.

Second, Kilby builds on her mistranslation of *Abstand* to argue that the application of terms derived from the passion narrative such as "kenosis", "suffering" and "death" to the intratrinitarian relationship provides no intelligible meaning and should thus be jettisoned as otiose. While Kilby importantly recognizes here that von Balthasar is not claiming God is univocally kenotic but rather anticipates the creaturely forms of kenosis found in the passion narrative, her argument that this makes the application of such terms to God meaningless is unjustified. As we noted in our response to Davis in section 10. 3., the principle of applying an abstract creaturely concept to God on the proviso that its meaning in the creaturely and divine contexts is not univocal is precisely what is established in *Summa Theologiae* I. 13 regarding creaturely perfections. As with Aquinas' "analogical predication", while we do not know exactly what the term means in its application to God, there is nevertheless some common thread between this prototypical expression in God and the mundane expression that gives the term meaning, on the basis that the former constitutes the presupposition of the mundane expression.

Fourth, despite claiming that terms derived from the passion narrative cannot possibly have their typical mundane meanings when applied to the triune life, Kilby proceeds to reject von Balthasar's argument on the grounds that it imports negative concepts such as "suffering" and "loss" into the divine such that they take on a positive valuation. This notable inconsistency reflects a significant slip in Kilby's otherwise nuanced recognition that von Balthasar is *not* simply eternalizing the passion narrative backwards to claim that God suffers, forsakes himself and dies at the immanent level. As von Balthasar makes clear, the triune relationality is one of perfect self-giving; however, by opening themselves up to one another so utterly, the divine persons become vulnerable to one another, and it is this vulnerability that has

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169 Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 39.

the potential to end in the negative forms of suffering and loss found on the cross when it encounters an other that does not reciprocate.[170] It is notable, furthermore, that the link von Balthasar consequently makes between love and renunciation, suffering and joy is precisely the link at the heart of the New Testament's paradoxical assertion that God discloses himself most definitively in the suffering and death of the cross of Godforsakenness (Deut 21:23). This is nowhere more explicit than in John's Gospel, where the cross is repeatedly depicted as Jesus' time of "glorification" (Jn 12:23, 28; 13:31; 17:1, 5).

Fifth, regarding Kilby's final charge that von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* is nothing more than the excessive speculation of a novelist rather than a theologian, it is clear that Kilby has not fully appreciated the overarching reasoning behind von Balthasar's enterprise and hence why it is not simply, as Kilby alleges, an attempt to make the biblical drama more "powerful" or "effective". This book has demonstrated, through examination of Barth and Jenson's theologies, that the *analogia temporalis* is not only a powerful tool to hold together the two central tenets of epistemology and divine freedom in tension at the heart of the Christian faith but is, moreover, a compulsory feature of any theology that seeks to avoid depicting God as fundamentally dependent on creation.

Von Balthasar's sensitivity towards this tension and his recognition of the centrality of the *analogia temporalis* in resolving it leads him to emphasize the principle in his theology to show how the divine mission of the Son can be fundamentally a temporal modality of his eternal procession from the Father. If this is indeed the case, then it follows that the dynamic of kenosis, suffering and death that dominates the mission of the Son throughout the New Testament witness is also a temporal modality of that which exists through the dynamic of begetting in the immanent Trinity. In so doing, von Balthasar is able to show both that the cross entails nothing substantially new in God to protect divine freedom, and that it is not completely superfluous to him such that it tells us nothing about God himself. In this way, von Balthasar circumvents the dominant trend in classical theology of protecting divine immutability by "evacuating the cross of deity" (as Jürgen Moltmann forcefully puts it)[171] by instead presenting the cross, following the biblical witness, as the event in which the divine is most truly encountered.

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170 While Tonstad is generally less convincing in her criticism of von Balthasar on this point, she does helpfully recognize the theme of "vulnerability" in von Balthasar's doctrine of the Trinity. See, Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 38.

171 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 214.

10.12 *Analogia temporalis* in Barth and von Balthasar

This chapter has shown that the key advantage of von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* over that of Barth is its ability to identify the divine missions as a temporal modality of the divine processions and thus to establish a fundamental unity between the two. While Barth's *analogia temporalis* has clear similarities with that of von Balthasar, he is conversely only able to say that the temporal missions that form the content of revelation *reflect* the eternal triune processions and election. This ultimately reduces revelation to a steppingstone in the pursuit of God's primordial reality established in these eternal events. Accordingly, as we have shown in chapter seven, Barth's theology pushes all focus backwards into pre-temporal eternity as the nexus both of God's original being-in-act of triune relationality, and his subsequent determination as for-us in election.

By contrast, von Balthasar is able to argue that the economy of salvation is not merely a temporal analogue of God's immanent reality but, far more profoundly, the authentic *manifestation* of this eternal reality in time. This important conclusion allows von Balthasar to argue that the kenosis, suffering, and even Godforsakenness and death that define the cross of Christ are not simply to be passed off to the human nature of Jesus but in fact take us to the very heart of the triune life. Yet, in seeking this immanent reality, von Balthasar's enterprise is not one of transcending revelation but simply attempting to understand the entire content of that revelation as one event spanning both eternity and time. By the same token, von Balthasar is also able to avoid the implication that the addition of a temporal dimension to the divine processions represents the actualization of a latent potential in God. Thus, unlike in Barth's theology, the principle of *analogia temporalis* does not undermine the identification of God as *actus purus*.

Von Balthasar's use of the *analogia temporalis* is one of the most developed in the history of the church. Nonetheless, it is not the contention of this book that his treatment renders Barth's account of this principle otiose such that we should simply replace it with that of von Balthasar. This is because von Balthasar's work omits almost all reference to the doctrine of election that occupies such a central role in Barth's use of the analogy. As a result, von Balthasar's theology fails to identify the *will* behind God's decision to give the divine processions their created terms in the first place, and hence fails to establish the all-important point that Christ is both the subject and object of that will. Accordingly, for all its sophistication, von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* is just as vulnerable as traditional Reformed supralapsarianism (see chapter two above) to the critique that it separates predestination from Christ and so relegates the basis of our salvation or rejection to an unknowable *decretum absolutum*.

As such, I instead propose that we combine von Balthasar's *analogia temporalis* with Barth's doctrine of eternity by understanding the decision of election as

presented in Barth's theology as a classically eternal act. It is only through this combination that we can argue that God's original will for humanity is comprehensively disclosed in revelation as none other than the cross of Christ. Furthermore, it is only by mediating the *analogia temporalis* through election in the way established by Barth that we can identify the *mechanism*, elusive in von Balthasar's treatment, by which God gives his eternal processions a temporal analogue. That is, we may define the sending of the Son without remainder as God's resolve to elect humanity in and through a human nature enhypostatic in the Logos. In conclusion, therefore, it is only by combining the theologies of von Balthasar and Barth that we can arrive at a comprehensive solution to the epistemology-freedom debate.

11.   Conclusion

11.1   Barth redux

In this book, we have identified two key motifs which Barth uses to balance the reliability of christological revelation with divine counterfactual freedom: the *analogia temporalis* and God as a being-in-act. We have seen how, on the basis of the *analogia temporalis*, Barth reformulates Calvinist double-predestination from a *decretum absolutum* made by an unknowable God to a proclamation of election with Jesus Christ as both its subject and object. Next, we provided a fresh reading of the *Church Dogmatics* that, in contrast to the dominant scholarship, is able to identify a consistent attitude towards divine ontology in which being and act are equiprimordial and mutually entailing. In this way, Barth is able to argue both that God would be essentially the same without his relationship *ad extra* (meaning that it can be undertaken graciously) and that this relationship has ontological significance and hence unreserved reliability (since there is no reality of God in which he is not engaged in loving relationality *ad extra*).

It is because of the broad success of this solution that the book does not propose simply dispensing with Barth, despite the problems with the execution of his programme identified in chapter seven. Rather, it is our contention that Barth's two central motifs are indeed the loci in which a successful harmonization between the reliability of christological revelation and divine counterfactual freedom is to be found; but on the condition that we are able to reframe them so as to circumvent the deficiencies present in Barth's explication. In the pursuit of this new framework, our discussion of Jenson's theology demonstrated that the temporal gap between God's primordial reality and the disclosure of this reality in revelation created by the *analogia temporalis* cannot simply be collapsed through a narratological metaphysic that rejects this use of analogy *tout court*. Rather, the far more serious problems with which Jenson's solution has to contend indicates that our corrective of Barth is in fact to be found by engaging in a more robust and comprehensive treatment of the *analogia temporalis*. Furthermore, the recognition that a predominant source of problems with Jenson's solution, as with Barth's, is its doctrine of eternity provides strong evidence that this doctrine has a significance in the epistemology-freedom debate that has hitherto been undervalued in scholarship. Instead, the use of the doctrine of eternity in an ancillary capacity shaped by a prior epistemological programme has both wasted the resources that a robust doctrine of eternity can provide, and resulted in a truncated doctrine that is unable to withstand exegetical and metaphysical scrutiny.

By contrast, the book proposes that we approach the epistemology-freedom debate from the explicit standpoint of the doctrine of eternity. The *classical* (viz., Boethian) doctrine of eternity was suggested for this task on two bases: First, because it is derived from metaphysical rather than epistemological concerns, meaning that it is able to stand up to the metaphysical scrutiny that undermines the arguments of Barth and Jenson. Second, because Barth's own doctrine of eternity purports to present the authentic reading of Boethius' definition of eternity, suggesting that a doctrine of eternity compatible with Barth's broad theology can be found within the classical tradition for whom Boethius' definition has consistently been archetypal. In examining the classical doctrine with Barth's two motifs in mind, we found that both *analogia temporalis* and the indissolubility of being and act in God (through the concept of *actus purus*) are compatible with and authentic expressions of the classical understanding of God's relationship to time.

Moreover, we found that the classical explications of Barth's central motifs have significant advantages over the Barthian originals. Unlike the successive conception of eternity within which Barth understands the indissolubility of being and act in God, a doctrine of eternity associated with the principle of *actus purus* facilitates an understanding of the incarnation as eternally operative within the immanent divine life. Thus, if the Logos becomes incarnate in time, it always has been, is and will be true to say that God is engaged in this act and hence that the Logos is *ensarkos* when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this way, the incarnation understood within a classical framework is far more intimately bound up with the Logos' immanent reality than Barth's theology is able to posit, ensuring the reliability of revelation by ultimately rejecting any rigid distinction between the Logos' reality on the immanent and economic levels. Further, it does a better job than Barth's metaphysics of maintaining that God's decision of election determines the divine being-in-act as God-for-us in the person of Christ, effectively subsuming predestination under christology and thus allowing us to see its content as comprehensively disclosed on the Cross.

Likewise, the classical *analogia temporalis* has the notable advantage over Barth's use of the principle in being able to identify the mission of the Son as a temporal modality of his eternal procession from the Father, and thus as fundamentally united with the latter. Developing the *analogia temporalis* along these lines, von Balthasar is able to understand the kenosis, suffering, Godforsakenness and death that characterize Christ's earthly life as the temporal manifestation of the dynamic of self-giving by which the Son is begotten of the Father, meaning christological revelation is able to take us to the very heart of the triune life. Thus, while Barth's *analogia temporalis* ultimately reduces revelation to a steppingstone towards a separate (albeit analogous) divine state-of-affairs behind it, von Balthasar's pursuit of God's immanent reality in no way transcends revelation but seeks simply to understand its *entire* content. Further, since the temporal mission is identified

as the decision to give an already existent eternal divine act a new set of created differentiae, the classical reading is able to refute the trap into which Barth falls of understanding the missions to *actualize* latent capacities in God. In this way, the classical understanding of the *analogia temporalis* as deployed by von Balthasar does not undermine the identification of God as *actus purus*.

Taking these classical principles of *actus purus* and *analogia temporalis* together, therefore, we are able to argue that God's identification as for-us in Jesus Christ follows the same basic logic as the Cappadocian explication of the trinitarian processions. Thus, while election presupposes a logically antecedent Logos *asarkos*, unlike in Barth's theology this figure has no temporal reality. This reading parallels the accepted trinitarian principle that the generation of the Son and Holy Spirit presupposes a logically antecedent Father but there was never a time in which the Father existed without the Son or Holy Spirit. The key difference between election and triune relationality is that while the former is merely a decree into which God freely enters, the latter is intrinsic to God's being. Nevertheless, our appeal to the classical motif of *actus purus* demonstrates that God's acts *ad extra* are as inseparable from the divine being as those *ad intra*. Accordingly, there is no way to transcend the Logos' reality as Jesus Christ, and hence to conceive of a God who is not God-for-us without engaging in abstraction, just as there is no way to transcend the Trinity to consider the Father alone as God without engaging in abstraction. Thus, while God's self-determination as for-us in election crucially remains contingent (thereby securing the gracious nature of this act), once it is been undertaken it is qualitatively indistinguishable from God's essential reality as Trinity. In this way, by denying a *Deus absconditus* behind and above Jesus Christ, it is possible effectively to secure the absolute reliability of christological revelation.

Furthermore, within a non-successive understanding of eternity, we remove the need to posit reiterative affirmations of God's triunity and election, and so remove the need to reduce God's constancy from robust immutability to "faithfulness". Barth's concept of God's reiterative triunity and election creates a tension in his theology: On the one hand, Barth can deny even the bare possibility of God contradicting the content of revelation, thereby undermining divine freedom and so the authenticity of these subsequent affirmations after the fact of election by claiming God cannot be God without this relationship *ad extra*. On the other hand, he can accept the bare counterfactual possibility, but even if God's faithfulness means he will never enact this, Barth has still thereby made God's triunity contingent (and therefore implicitly modalistic). In the classical model, by contrast, the question of whether God can ever rescind his essential triunity or his determination as for-us can only represent a category error, since eternity is not subject to the before-after structure this question presupposes. By the same token, we are also able effectively to secure divine freedom both logically prior and posterior to the decision of election-incarnation.

11.2   Reframing classical eternity

Nevertheless, the contention of this book is not just that Barth's arguments can be made comprehensive by being translated through the classical doctrine of eternity. Rather, it makes the equally strong assertion that the classical doctrine of eternity is revitalized by being read against a Barthian background. In this regard, it is significant to note that both the identification of God as *actus purus* and the principle of *analogia temporalis*, while original to the classical doctrine of eternity, have been underdeveloped or even outright misrepresented within contemporary scholarship. As we noted in relation to *actus purus*, despite the principal importance of *potentia* and *actus* in the classical tradition, barely any direct scholarship exists on these concepts, and their meanings have been taken for granted as "potential/potentiality" and "actual/actuality", ignoring their indissoluble relationship with activity.

Even that minority of theologians who do engage in a sustained treatment of the *analogia temporalis* stand to benefit immensely from Barth's explication of the principle. We have shown that Barth's mediation of the analogy between christological revelation and God's triunity through the decision of election offers the crucial advantage of overcoming the *decretum absolutum* associated with traditional expressions of predestination. Furthermore, the doctrine of election makes the *analogia temporalis* more holistic by providing the mechanism, lacking in von Balthasar's account, by which the divine processions gain their new created differentiae. That is, combining Barth's account with our own allows us to understand the decision of election as none other than the decision to give the procession of the Son from the Father its temporal mission. By extension, we are able to identify the election of humanity in the crucified Logos specifically as the temporal form of the acts of kenotic self-giving, suffering, Godlessness, and death that are eternally present in the triune life. Thus, we are able to argue in even stronger terms than Barth that election is comprehensively disclosed in revelation, since its content is not merely realized on the cross but is, moreover, none other than the cross itself.

Even beyond these two principles, however, the Barthian background against which we framed the second half of this book has prompted a fundamental recasting of the classical doctrine of eternity. The understanding of God's relationship to time we have arrived at in this book retains far more of the dynamism of time than contemporary discussions of classical eternity would suggest. Following Barth's identification of both *stare* and *fluere* in Boethius' definition of eternity, we have rediscovered the continued presence of an extensional model of eternity alongside the point-like model in the most influential medieval discussions of the doctrine. From this, we have argued that eternity contains the archetypal forms of both duration and movement, without needing to resort to the "successive" frameworks of Barth and Jenson. More than this, however, we have also argued that the near ubiquitous depiction of classical eternity as "absolute timelessness" represents a

significant misunderstanding of the way this doctrine was understood by its ancient and medieval proponents. Instead, for the classical tradition, eternity is nothing less than the truest form of time, from which all created time derives its existence.

In short, this book has argued that the classical doctrine of eternity with which we are familiar from contemporary discussion, barring a few exceptional examinations (such as that of Leftow), represents a fundamental mischaracterization. And it is due to the prevalence of this mischaracterization that the classical doctrine has been almost universally rejected today. Taking Barth's concerns and emphases seriously when examining this doctrine revitalizes theological discussion by prompting a rediscovery of those same features in classical eternity that have been lost or underdeveloped. In this way, the book proposes that the Barthian and classical contributions to the epistemology-freedom debate are mutually beneficial.

11.3   Reclaiming classical eternity

In proposing the classical doctrine of eternity as the appropriate framework to "correct" Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate, the immediate critique with which we must contend is that this interpretation of eternity is incompatible with the Christian God. As we noted in section 9. 1., it is this very conviction that leads Barth to replace classical eternity with his own successive account of the doctrine in the first place, believing the latter to be more representative of what the Bible teaches us about God. Yet, it has always been a basic principle of Christian theology that whatever our faith impels us to say must be true, so long as it can be established within orthodox parameters. The basic premise of this book is that the Christian faith urges us to profess both that Christ provides a definitive, reliable picture of God, and that God's acts of creation and redemption are gracious in nature and therefore freely undertaken. Thus, if these two tenets can coherently be held together within the classical doctrine of eternity, then that doctrine must represent at least *an* authentic Christian understanding of God's relationship to time. In order to secure this, however, we must show that the classical doctrine of eternity does not render the rest of Christianity's basic assertions incoherent. We will focus on three commonly cited disqualifying corollaries of classical eternity: first, that it renders God static and lifeless, second, that it is incompatible with scriptural statements about God's relationship to time, and, third, that it is incompatible with belief in the incarnation.

When we turn to the classical doctrine of eternity, however, we find that the very same principles which have been rediscovered and emphasized by reading it against a Barthian background also refute these three assertions. Turning first to the claim that the classical doctrine of eternity renders God static and lifeless, we have shown that classical eternity is in fact an inherently dynamic concept, since

eternity is actually the truest form of time. Thus, in the face of claims that dynamism presupposes temporality while classical eternity is antithetical to time ("absolute timelessness"), this book shows that eternity is the archetype and origin of time, and hence the archetype and origin of all dynamism.

We have further shown that the seminal exponents of classical eternity uniformly associated this concept with "life", and that this association has determined the basic character of classical eternity by demanding that it be interpreted in extensional as well as point-like terms. When it is recognized that the classical doctrine of eternity was designed first and foremost to explain how a simple being can be alive, it becomes obvious that the claim the classical doctrine renders God abstract and lifeless rests on a complete misunderstanding of it. Underlying this misunderstanding is the fact that the intimate association between classical "eternity" and "life" that we have identified in this book has been almost completely obscured in many contemporary articulations.

Finally, we have shown that the two features of time typically presented to secure its dynamism – movement and activity – are actually found in their archetypal forms in eternity. Both are commonly denied in contemporary descriptions of classical eternity based on a selective reading of the classical tradition that focuses on those occasions when they have been incorrectly identified with change. In the case of movement, we have found that Aquinas does indeed misread Aristotle's definition of time in terms of movement, and so argue that movement must be absent in eternity because it entails change. Nonetheless, we have shown that Aristotle in fact argues that eternity transcends both movement and rest, and hence that eternity should be understood to contain a form of dynamism in which movement and rest are united. Furthermore, we have shown that this conclusion has strong roots in ancient thought, found in the theologies of Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. In the case of activity, we have found that Plato does indeed struggle to reconcile activity with eternity, again on the understanding that all activity entails change. Nonetheless, we have shown that the classical tradition on this point follows Aristotle, who uses the concept of ἐνέργεια to show that there are cases of activity that do not involve change, in which a subject acts in its "natural" way. Thus, by showing that neither movement nor activity are inherently types of change, we have been able reclaim both for a classically eternal God.

Regarding the assertion that classical eternity is incompatible with biblical statements about God's relationship to time,[1] we may note two significant points which

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1 This argument is notably presented in extended form by Alan Padgett in Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, 24–35. While Padgett's historical-critical response to biblical scholars' "proof-texts" for classical eternity in the Old and New Testaments is excellent, his application of the same reasoning to theological proof-texts ignores the possibility of anything but *intentio auctoris* readings of the Bible. This is unsustainable given the rich history of reinterpreting scripture beyond its original

speak against this charge. First, our analysis of Barth and Jenson's theology has demonstrated that Christianity needs to contend with the clear scriptural tendency to understand the pre-existence of the Son under the identity of Jesus Christ rather than as an abstract Logos *asarkos*. It is in part this recognition that prompts both Barth and Jenson to propose ways in which the Logos may be said to pre-exist as Christ. In this regard, however, the classical assertion that God eternally undertakes the act of incarnation and hence that the Logos is eternally enfleshed within the immanent triune life offers a much more convincing explanation of scripture than either the pre-temporal hypostatic union of Barth or the narrative pre-existence of Jenson. Second, our proposed nuancing of the classical doctrine of eternity to show that it contains the truest form of duration goes a significant way to interpreting those passages presented by Barth as evidence of a successive account of eternity.[2] For example, it explains how the Bible can describe eternity via terms such as *'olam* and αἰών which denote duration, and even why the biblical writers were happy to speak of God's 'years' or 'days', or as 'from everlasting to everlasting' (Ps 90:2).[3]

Finally, the claim that the classical doctrine of eternity is incompatible with the incarnation is refuted by Kant's defence of eternal causes bringing about temporal effects. We have unpacked this claim by showing that a God conceived according to the classical doctrine of eternity is able to embed temporal effects into creation on the basis that God's act is simultaneous with temporal things *in eternity*. We have further illustrated the possibility of eternal incarnation through the concept of a scattered temporal event consisting of (1) God eternally engaging in the act of adding a human (and thus temporal) nature to the divine hypostasis of the Son, and (2) the coming into existence of this human nature as the historical Jesus in 4 BCE.

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intended meaning in light of the incarnation that forms the core of the Christian approach to the Old Testament.

2 I do not claim by this that the biblical authors themselves held a classical account of divine eternity. Rather, my point is simply that biblical statements about eternity as extensive or infinite duration can be reconciled with the classical model when the latter is understood as the archetype of all temporal duration.

3 Beyond these two points, I direct the reader to my article '"Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am": A Theological Treatise on the Concept of Time in John's Gospel', *Modern Theology* 35, no. 4 (2019), in which I demonstrate that the classical doctrine of eternity provides the most convincing explanation for the eschatological and narratological temporal peculiarity of John's Gospel.

11.4 Moving forwards

The wider impact of this book is threefold. First, we have provided a plausible solution to the epistemology-freedom debate through use of the classical doctrine of eternity's principles of *actus purus* and *analogia temporalis*. As Jenson observes, however, this attempt to balance the reliability of christological revelation with the desire to protect divine freedom has recurred throughout history as a key component in the disputes between (for example) Alexandria and Antioch, between the eastern and western churches, and between Lutheran and Reformed traditions.[4] Consequently, this debate has shaped the contours of Christian theology, and stances in the debate have become part of the identities of the major Christian traditions. It follows that the contribution to this debate proposed in the book has implications not just for the isolated study of Christian epistemology and metaphysics but for ecumenical Christian theology as a whole, and the key debates by which the boundaries between different confessional traditions are drawn.

Second, since we have identified the doctrine of eternity both as a key source of problems with Barthian and post-Barthian solutions, and as providing essential resources for our own solution, the book further demonstrates that this doctrine has been undervalued in Christian theology. That is, we have argued that its use in a solely ancillary capacity based on presupposed epistemologies neglects the robust theological work it can accomplish. By the same token, the book proposes that approaching other theologoumena through the lens of the doctrine of eternity has the potential to provide additional contributions. To name but a few examples, a robust use of the doctrine of eternity has obvious implications for work on atonement theory, eschatology, and the relation between the two natures in Christ.

Third, we have not only argued that the classical doctrine of eternity provides the best way of ensuring the coherence of Christian belief, viz., the reliability of christological revelation and divine counterfactual freedom, but in the course of doing so have also reframed the classical doctrine of eternity away from its contemporary mischaracterization. As Nelson Pike observes, however, the doctrine of eternity has a 'controlling effect on the general shape and texture of [one's] broad theological view about the nature of God'.[5] Every aspect of Christian theology either presupposes a particular understanding of God's relationship to time or else achieves intelligible explication only in relation to such an understanding. Thus, since the vast majority of theologians no longer accept the classical doctrine of eternity, to argue convincingly for this interpretation of God's relationship to time has the potential to reshape the theological *status quo*.

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4 Jenson, 'God's Time', 32–33.

5 Pike, *God and Timelessness*, ix.

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