

# Timelessness, Trinity and temporality

First submission: 8 February 2011

Acceptance: 28 February 2011

In philosophy and theology there exists a complex relation between timelessness, Trinity and temporality. Timelessness is an age-old attribute given to God in philosophical and theological traditions, but within the last century's development of trinitarian theology new emphasis has been placed on God's temporality. This article discusses the trinitarian theologian Robert W Jenson's understanding of God's "temporal infinity" as well as the theologian Antje Jackelén's theology of time. Their proposed concepts of God's time/eternity is analysed in terms of the contemporary philosophical and scientific debates on the nature of time. Although Jenson's and Jackelén's conceptions of God's time/eternity might, to a great extent, be philosophically sound, they still have some unresolved – perhaps more theological than philosophical – implications.

## Tydloosheid, Triniteit en temporaliteit

In filosofie en teologie bestaan daar 'n uiters komplekse verhouding tussen tydloosheid, Triniteit en temporaliteit. In beide hierdie tradisies is tydloosheid 'n eeue-oue eienskap van God, maar binne die ontwikkeling van die trinitariese teologie van die vorige eeu is nuwe beklemtoning op God se temporaliteit geplaas. Hierdie artikel bespreek die trinitariese teoloog Robert W Jenson se verstaan van God se "temporele oneindigheid" sowel as die teoloog Antje Jackelén se teologie van tyd. Beide se voorstelle oor God se tyd/ewigheid word geanaliseer in terme van die kontemporêre filosofiese en natuurwetenskaplike debatte oor die aard van tyd. Alhoewel Jenson en Jackelén se konsepte van God se tyd/ewigheid in 'n groot mate filosofies houdbaar is, het dit steeds onopgeloste – dalk meer teologies as filosofies – implikasies.

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Since the debate between Heraclites and Parmenides in early Greek philosophy, the relationship between time and eternity has been one of the most problematic issues in both philosophy and theology for a long time. Currently this issue is being raised as a focal point for debate on the understanding of the nature of God's eternity and its relation to time.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch theologian Louis Berkhof (1988: 60) once mentioned that "the relationship of eternity to time constitutes one of the most difficult problems in philosophy and theology". This article analyses this problem within the context of recent developments in theology and philosophy. The interdisciplinary nature of the problem of time makes it imperative to also take into account the developments in the understanding of time in the natural sciences. This is perhaps too ambitious a task for this article which will focus on only some aspects within the debate.

Timelessness is an age-old attribute given to God in philosophical and theological traditions. This concept of God reigned unchallenged from Aristotle and Augustine to Aquinas. Duns Scotus was perhaps the first to break ranks on God's timelessness. Numerous philosophers and theologians followed and within the last century's development of Trinitarian theology new emphasis has been placed on God's temporality. According to the theologian Robert W Jenson, for example, the Trinity is indispensable to a Christian concept of God, and divine temporality is essential to the meaning of the Trinity. Jenson speaks of the Trinity's time as "temporal infinity" – a term which demonstrates God's self-liberation from temporal contingencies without extracting him from history. This description of God's time is, for Jenson, more biblical than the Greek concept of timelessness. On the basis of an entirely different argument, the theologian Antje Jackelén agrees with Jenson that God is not timeless. She developed a "theology of time" in which time is understood

1 The theologian Eunsoo Kim's book *Time, eternity, and the Trinity* (2010) gives a good overview of the history of this problem as well as the latest developments. It also gives a good indication of all the recent publications in philosophy and theology relating to time and eternity and of the relevance of this debate. Kim (2010: 2) mentions, for example, that: "One of the red-hot issues in contemporary Christian theology is the problem of the renewed understanding of God's eternity and its relation to time."

as relational and dynamic. This understanding of time led her to a perspective – very similar to that of Jenson – on the relation between God and time/eternity.

This article will pursue the question to Jenson and Jackelén as to whether their concepts of the Trinity's time as "temporal infinity" and time as relational/dynamic are logically and philosophically tenable. Are their concepts coherent and how do these concepts deal with the critique (from philosophical and theological perspectives) on God's temporality and its implications? This article will thus investigate the problems of the relationship between "timelessness, Trinity and temporality" as it is mainly described by Jenson and Jackelén. An analysis of Jenson's understanding of God's time as "temporal infinity" will be made. It will be argued that Jenson agrees, to some extent, with Antje Jackelén's understanding of time within a Trinitarian model in which the emphasis on eschatology allows reflection upon time as multi-temporality or a complexity of times. Jackelén prefers this "relationality and multiplicity" of time in physics instead of the understanding of time in Newtonian or static terms. She describes her theology of time as dynamic and relational and finds in the model of the Trinity space for this dynamism (as the open life of the three persons between them) and relationality (as the relationships between the three persons in the Trinity) of her understanding of eternity and time. Jenson's and Jackelén's argument against God's timelessness will be scrutinised in terms of the traditional philosophical view of God's timelessness.<sup>2</sup> Classical theism's as well as Paul Helm's arguments for God's timelessness will be discussed in contrast to Jenson's and Jackelén's view. Their views will be placed in the context of how new developments in the metaphysics of time relate to God's nature, in particular recent developments of the A-theory (the dynamic model) and the B-theory (the static model). It appears that different theological and philosophical understandings of how God relates to time afford legitimate criteria for differing metaphysical decisions about the nature of temporality.

2 It will become clear that Jenson and Jackelén do not argue for a complete temporal understanding of God, but rather against a timeless understanding of God's eternity.

Jenson's understanding of God's time as "temporal infinity" might be compatible with some of these metaphysical decisions. Jackelén's theology of time also makes some clear metaphysical decisions and the implications of both these theologians' proposals might thus be controversial within orthodox theology.

## 1. God's eternity as "temporal infinity" – Robert W Jenson

Robert Jenson is well known as a significant and prolific writer on Trinitarian theology and eschatology. Jenson is an American Lutheran theologian who has written extensively and very creatively about the Trinity, time and eternity, for over forty years.<sup>3</sup> Some of his main works as a Trinitarian theologian include the following dogmatic works: *Systematic theology* (1997, 1999),<sup>4</sup> *God after God: the God of the past and the God of the future, seen in the work of Karl Barth* (1969), and *Alpha and Omega* (1963, 1969). He also wrote the more comprehensive *Triune identity: God according to the Gospel* (1982), *Christian dogmatics* (1984),<sup>5</sup> *Unbaptized God: the basic flaw in ecumenical theology* (1992)<sup>6</sup> and the short and popular *Story and promise: a brief theology of the Gospel about Jesus* (1973). Of these books, his *Systematic theology* should be singled

- 3 Although Jenson is often described as an American theologian, he is well known and respected internationally as a theologian. In the book *Trinity, time, and church: a response to the theology of Robert W Jenson* (edited by Gunton 2000), theologians from all over the world and from many different denominations contributed essays of appreciation and dialogue with Jenson's theology.
- 4 *Systematic theology, 1: the triune God* (1997) and *Systematic theology, 2: the works of God* (1999). Hereafter referred to as *ST1* and *ST2*. The theologian Carl Braaten states that these books are undoubtedly the crowning fulfilment of Jenson's career.
- 5 *Christian dogmatics* (1984) was written in collaboration with his colleague Carl Braaten. Jenson wrote the chapters on the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments.
- 6 In *Unbaptized God* (1992) Jenson argues that Christian theology took over a Hellenistic divinity without "baptising" it. By that he means that God's impassibility and timelessness (as part of the Greek metaphysics) was not overcome in Christian theology and that this problem has led, to a great extent, to later ecumenical dividedness.

out as his *magnum opus* in which he systematically synthesised his creative Trinitarian theology that has developed over many years. In *Systematic theology* he builds his entire theology on his insights into the relationship between God and time.<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this article, note should be taken of Jenson as an important theologian who connects the Trinity with temporality, a somewhat controversial conceptual move in both theology and philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Jenson's theology is, to a great extent, a reaction to the Hellenistic influences on the early church's theology, in particular as far as concepts such as the timelessness and impassibility of God are concerned.<sup>9</sup> Jenson regards the definition of God's eternity as "timeless" as unbiblical and incompatible with the story of creation and redemption.<sup>10</sup> God is not timeless, but God is "identified by specific temporal actions and is known within certain temporal communities by personal names and identifying descriptions thereby

- 7 For a discussion about the link between Jenson's narrative theology and his understanding of time/eternity, cf Verhoef's (2008) article "How is Robert Jenson telling the story?"
- 8 The philosopher Richard Rice (2007: 328) explains why Jenson is an important theologian in the discussion about eternity and time: "The question therefore arises as to how one might conceive of divine temporality without a temporal world for God to experience. The resurgence of Trinitarian thought in recent decades provides a possible resource for dealing with this issue. The work of Robert W. Jenson, in particular, is notable for the way it connects Trinity and temporality".
- 9 Jason Curtis (2005: 23) explains that: "According to Jenson, the Greeks, in an effort toward security of existence over against time's fleetingness, defined eternity in terms of timelessness. Since humanity cannot embrace our past, present, and future giving us the coherence of life that we naturally desire, the ancient Greeks projected that ability onto God and therefore defined deity in terms of persistence or immutability. Jenson asserts that while the early church did not simply assimilate Hellenism into its theology, it nonetheless failed to rid itself of certain debilitating features, the pinnacle of which is the notion of divine timelessness."
- 10 Pannenberg (2000: 49) states: "Jenson is surely right in contending that the God of the Bible is identified by temporal events, and indeed by a history of such events. He boldly integrates this insight with his Trinitarian theology by conceiving of the biblical narrative as 'the final truth of God's own reality' in the mutual relations of God the Father, His incarnate Son, and the eschatological accomplishment of their communion by the Spirit."

provided" (ST1: 44). God is not timeless, but lively, active, an event. Jenson follows Gregory of Nyssa's thoughts: "God [...] refers to the mutual *action* of the identities' divine 'energies', to the perichoretic *life*" (ST1: 214) and "*This* being of God is not a something, however rarefied or immaterial, but a *going-on*, a sequentially palpable event, like a kiss or a train wreck" (ST1: 214). Jenson describes this "temporality" of God as God's "temporal infinity". He prefers to use the term "infinity" (limitlessness) instead of "timelessness" about God, because God is not infinite in the sense that he "extends indefinitely, but because no temporal activity can keep up with the activity that he is" (ST1: 216). God is infinite not by having no boundaries, but by overcoming the boundaries. Therefore Jenson mentions that God's being should be described as temporal infinity. For Jenson this term demonstrates God's self-liberation from temporal contingencies, without extracting him from history.

According to Jenson, the "biblical God's eternity is his *temporal infinity*" (ST1: 217) and this description of God is for Jenson more biblical than the Greek concept of timelessness. It is a description of God that implies that "while one might believe that divine temporality necessarily leads one to a god in process or one lacking sovereign lordship [...] it is precisely this 'overcoming' of boundaries that demonstrates God is Lord" (Curtis 2005: 27). God is God because he overcomes all boundaries.<sup>11</sup> He is therefore identifiable by his temporal acts of creation and redemption, but also infinite in the sense that he is not bound by temporality. The implication of this understanding of God is that he is not impassable or immutable, not immune to suffering and change, but a god who is alive and active and involved in the world and its history. God is present, loving, encompassing in our time and place – a timely and timeful God.<sup>12</sup>

11 Jenson explains: "Any eternity is some transcendence of temporal limits, but the biblical God's eternity is not the simple contradiction of time. What he transcends is not the having of beginnings and goals and reconciliations, but any personal limitation in having them [...] The true God is not eternal because he lacks time, but because he takes time" (ST1: 217).

12 These terms as a consequence of God being "temporally infinite" are discussed in more detail by Ted Peters (1998) in his article "God happens: the timeliness of the triune God".

According to Jenson, this temporal infinity or “timefulness” of God is not merely something ascribed to God, but it is part of the being of God; it is central to the relationships within the Trinity – it defines God. For Jenson there is a clear connection between the poles of time and the mutual triune roles of Father, Son, and Spirit. According to him, the “... Father is the ‘whence’ of God’s life; the Spirit is the ‘whither’ of God’s life; and [...] the Son is that life’s specious present” (*ST1*: 218-9). For Jenson, God possesses a past, present, and future in himself, not only as pure duration (as Karl Barth understood it, with no conflict but only peace between source, movement and goal), but as a temporal infinity.<sup>13</sup> Jenson states that God “... is *temporally* infinite because ‘source’ and ‘goal’ are present *and* asymmetrical in him, because he is primally future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself” (*ST1*: 217).<sup>14</sup>

To be God is thus not only to be infinite (by overcoming boundaries) but temporally infinite and for Jenson this means that time is functioning as a real past, present and future in God himself, and that it is only in the Spirit, the future, that God is able to be freed from the past and present, to be freed from “the timelessness of mere form or mere consciousness” (*ST1*: 217). To be God is thus to be always open to a future and to always open a future.<sup>15</sup> But Jenson is careful not to let the whence (Father) and whither (Spirit) fall apart in God’s life. He states that this does not happen; God’s duration is without loss, because “... origin and goal, whence and whither, are indomitably reconciled in the action and suffering of the Son” (*ST1*: 219). So it is in the Son, the specious present, that the Father and Spirit (source

13 Jenson agrees with the pure duration of Barth in the sense that “nothing in God recedes into the past or approaches from the future” but he differs from Barth when he adds: “But the difference is also absolute: the arrow of God’s eternity, like the arrow of casual time, does not reverse itself. Whence and whither in God are not like right or left or up and down on a map, but are like before and after in a narrative” (*ST1*: 218).

14 Jenson’s eschatological focus is clear in this instance – a central theme in Jack-  
elén’s theology of time.

15 Jenson states that to be God is to “... always creatively open[s] to what he will be; not in that he hangs on, but in that he gives and receives; not that he perfectly persists, but in that he perfectly anticipates” (*ST1*: 217).

and goal) find their unity and are reconciled. With this structure of time within the Trinity Jenson is trying to avoid timelessness, on the one hand, and to maintain *perichoresis*, on the other.

The climax of Jenson's theology is that the end will be *theosis*: "God and only God is the creature's future. God the Spirit is God's own future and so draws to and into the triune converse those for whom the Trinity makes room" (*ST2*: 26).<sup>16</sup> It can thus be stated that the unity of Jenson's theology lies in the fact that the Trinity is temporally defined, in relation to the claim that God is in fact the mutual life and action of the three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, as they move toward the future. This relationship between God and time is central to Jenson's Trinitarian thought, but the relationship between time and space – and consequently our space in God – needs to be clarified if we want to understand what Jenson means by a Trinity that "makes room" for us.

As noted earlier, for Jenson time is no longer what separates God and world, but time is what they have in common. But while time is something "outside" us, Jenson mentions that time is inside the divine subjective centre. Jenson follows Augustine's description that time is "... the 'distention' of a personal reality [...] That is: the 'stretching out' that makes time is an extension not of finite consciousness but of an infinite enveloping consciousness" (*ST2*: 34). It is in this "enveloping consciousness" of God that time is internal. It is not outside God, but inside Him, asymmetrical in his *perichoresis* that time exists.

In addition, for Jenson it is "... exactly the divine internality of time that is the possibility of creaturehood at all" (Cumin 2007: 173). In this instance there is the strong relationship of time and space when Jenson states:

16 According to Pannenberg (2000: 49), it is at this point where Jenson's systematic unity of his theology is found: "... unity is provided by the trinitarian perspective: from the beginning, the creation was intended for 'inclusion' in the triune community by virtue of union with Christ, the purpose being a 'perfected human community.' That is the promise of the gospel which is anticipated in the life of the Church and is finally achieved in the final advent of the Kingdom".



for God to create is for him to *make accommodation* in his triune life for other persons and things than the three whose mutual life he is. In himself, he *opens room*, and that act is the event of creation [...] We call this accommodation in the triune life 'time' [...] creation is above all God's taking time for us (ST2: 25).

So for Jenson created time is accommodation in God's eternity for others than God and therefore one can speak about "God's *roominess*" (ST2: 25). This implies that everything seems to exist in God and that there is no other way possible for things to exist.

This viewpoint of Jenson is, of course, not without critique from theologians and philosophers.<sup>17</sup> One problem is that, in Jenson's (2006: 33) words:

Those on the one side of the argument accuse those on the other of so identifying God with history among us as to make him dependent on us. Those of the latter party accuse those of the former of continuing so to construe eternity by categories alien to the biblical account of God – for example, by timelessness.

Of course, the different sides have different implications, and Jenson admits that he is among those accused of confusing God and creation. Jenson's defence is, however, that this is an age-old clash that "... has recurred throughout theological history, between Alexandria – my side – and Antioch, East and West, Lutheran and Reformed" (Jenson 2006: 33) and it must be added that Jenson at least tries to develop a new understanding of God's relationship to time – the success of which judgement must be reserved at this stage, because the "theology of time" of Antje Jackelén will help to put Jenson's theology within a broader context.

## 2. A theology of time – Antje Jackelén

The theologian Antje Jackelén, Bishop of Lund, Sweden, agrees with Jenson as far as the relationship between God and time is

17 Richard Rice (2007: 321) is, in general, positive about Jenson's attempt to make a persuasive case that the Trinity involves temporality, but he also has critique: "Jenson's insights are obscured, however, by problematic references to time as a sphere to which God is related". In my view this need not be a problem and the "obscurity" is rather a complexity which creates various possibilities.

concerned. In her book, *Time and eternity, the question of time in church, science, and theology* (2005)<sup>18</sup> she gives a thorough and carefully presented theology of time and, by its very essence, an incomplete and open thought model because time will always be, according to her, dynamic and relational. Unlike Jenson, Jackelén does not present a whole systematic theology based on her understanding of God's relationship to time, but develops instead a "theology of time" as part of an interdisciplinary dialogue between natural science, philosophy and religion. She starts with an investigation of time and eternity in Christian hymnals, and links her findings to a discussion of time in the Bible and theology. She also investigates the notion of time in the structure of scientific theories, and finally develops her relational and dynamic theology of time within the context of the natural sciences.<sup>19</sup> What makes Jackelén's work so promising is the fact that her work is interdisciplinary (more so than Jenson's) and therefore her understanding of time and eternity has a broader appeal to philosophy and natural science. Jackelén's theology of time can thus help to give more philosophical and scientific grounds for proposals of the relationship of God and time than we find in, for example, Jenson's theology.<sup>20</sup>

Jackelén follows Ricoeur's understanding of time as something that must be narrated<sup>21</sup> and that cannot be confined within a simple, unambiguous concept.<sup>22</sup> She mentions that "... because time cannot

18 This book is a revised version of her doctoral thesis accepted by Lund University, originally published in German and Swedish and later in English.

19 Jackelén (2005: 226) specifies that it is "... without thereby making theology dependent upon scientific theories or 'exploiting' physical theories theologically, [it is] a hermeneutics that rests on the self-evidence of the discussion and the desire for contact [that] leads here to an enhanced understanding."

20 An examination of Jackelén's whole theology of time or its development is beyond the scope of this article. Only her main findings and proposals will be discussed in order to seek similarities with Jenson's proposals.

21 According to Ricoeur (1988: 241), "... each attempt to analyze time directly only multiplies the problems that occur anyway. For this reason, there is no conception of time without narrated time."

22 Strauss (2010: 175) drew the same conclusion to a certain extent in his article "Do we really comprehend time?": "What is indeed  *baffling* about  *ontic time* is

be abstracted, but occurs instead as lived time, it cannot be captured theologically in a fixed system. It can be talked about only under the auspices of dynamism and relationality” (Jackelén 2005: 226). Jackelén prefers this relational and dynamic understanding of time, supported, according to her, by scientific theories such as relativistic and quantum physics, thermodynamics and chaos theory, instead of Newton’s chronological linear concept of time which leads too easily to a deterministic view of God.<sup>23</sup> The question, however, is what does Jackelén mean by the nature of time as relational and dynamic?

With a relational understanding of time Jackelén tries to avoid her own criticism of understanding time as one single generally valid concept. She admits that one can view time as a convention or a construction, but “... one can come close to it only as lived time and narrated time. From the anthropological perspective, time is ‘life-time’ and, just so, the medium of relationships: relationships to living things and nonliving things, to one’s self, and to God” (Jackelén 2005: 227). Time is thus life with all its connections. To have time is to be related and therefore death is the crisis of relation, since in death relationship is lost. Jackelén develops a Christian understanding of death in which the notion of God’s faithfulness and constancy in building consistent relations with humankind, even in the case of death, is central. This leads Jackelén to reflect on eternity as the other of time – an insight developed in relation to Emmanuel Levinas.<sup>24</sup> Important for her is that Levinas (1987: 32) does not describe time as a degradation of eternity, but as the relationship to that which would

that it exceeds every possible concept of time we can obtain and therefore ultimately it can only be approximated in a *concept-transcending idea*” [his italics, AV].

- 23 Hubert Meisinger (2009: 987) summarises Jackelén’s view on this point clearly: “Time – and this is her final conclusion – is no abstraction but is ‘lived time’, dynamic and relational. Time is time of life with all its connections. Thus there cannot exist a closed, for all time existing theology of time but only a thought model that leaves room for openness. God is not deterministic but has long ago left the house of Newton – or has never been in it...”.
- 24 It is however important for Jackelén that God’s eternity cannot simply be the negative Other of time. That will make God timeless and will not result in a positive relation between God and time (temporal world).

not allow itself to be assimilated by experience. For Jackelén there is thus a dynamic relationality between time and eternity, and she rejects models that both contrast dualistically the temporal world to an eternal God and merge eternity and time: “Time is more than a deficient eternity, and eternity is something other than multiplied time” (Jackelén 2005: 116).

In order to best understand the relationship between time and eternity, Jackelén examined three differentiating models, namely a quantitative model, an ontological model and an eschatological model. She chooses the eschatological model for three reasons: first its power to overcome the dualism of time and eternity; secondly, it implies the possibility of speaking reasonably about the temporal openness of God (that would contribute – very importantly for her – to the comprehensibility of the ‘already’ and the ‘not-yet’) and, thirdly, it corresponds, according to Jackelén (2005: 226), “... in a most promising way to the scientific theories that speak of dynamic development and complexity”. This choice of an eschatological model makes Jackelén’s relational understanding of the nature of time very dynamic. For her, relational and dynamic time belong together, because a static and one-dimensional understanding of time is not possible (at least no longer, although she admits that Newtonian mechanics function often perfectly in the realm of our daily life). In *Time and eternity* Jackelén discusses time in Newtonian, relativistic and quantum physics, thermodynamics, and chaos theory, and concludes with a relational and multiplicity of time in physics which has supplanted the strong principle of causality and which is open toward the future – a more dynamic understanding of time than the Newtonian. Meisinger (2009: 983) mentions in this respect that “... the notion of chance also plays an important role because its scientific understanding can build up a creative tension to a theology in which there is a primacy of potentiality over against actuality/reality”. An open understanding of time marked by the “already” and “not-yet” is therefore indispensable in Jackelén’s theological reflection about time.

As mentioned earlier, Jackelén chooses the eschatological model for the relationship between time and eternity. The consequences of

this eschatologically qualified relationality of time for understanding the future is that the “future becomes comprehensible as a relational structure consisting of future and advent” (Jackelén 2005: 230).<sup>25</sup> Eschatology is therefore, for Jackelén, primarily the expression for the relationality of old and new, of future and advent, of identity and alterity. A relational dynamic understanding of time understands the future as open and it assumes the temporal openness of God which is qualified eschatologically. Jackelén (2005: 229) speaks of the “constitution of our time through God’s selection from divine time and also of eternity as the internal ground that enables temporal life”. Jackelén thus moves away from the static-dualistic way of thinking of separating the temporal world and the eternal God; of understanding time as the antithesis of eternity, and instead considers an increase in complexity that occurs “in, with, and under” nonlinear interactions. As such time can be acknowledged as lived time and life time. This, of course, has implications for the understanding of God’s relationship to time/eternity. First, God cannot be described as timeless, because He is in relation to time, He is “temporally open” and relates to everything always anew (eschatological). According to Jackelén, God’s eternity grounds and enables our temporal life, and therefore God has a positive relationship with the temporal world.

Jackelén’s strong relational and dynamic understanding of time implies for theology that it should abandon an absolute, static, theistic notion of God, in order to gain a dynamic and relational notion of God that gets along more easily with modern scientific insights in physics. A Trinitarian model suits Jackelén’s thinking well, because it notes the complexity of God and provides better possibilities for

25 The advent is the “truly new” or that which comes (*adventus*) and the future is an extrapolation of the past and present (*futurum*) of which we can only talk from the perspective of our present and which correlates to scientific progress. In his article “The rhythm of God’s eternal music: on Antje Jackelén’s *Time and eternity*” Meisinger (2009) shows that Jackelén probably agrees with the German mathematician that the reduction of time on a straight line is functional in classic mechanics, but does not adequately represent the reality of time. Meisinger adds that Muller’s matrix of time can be helpful for Jackelén’s description of “advent” and “future”.

the relation of God, time and eternity than a one-dimensional understanding of God. Jackelén (2005: 190) states that "... the strength of Trinitarian models lies in the possibility of conceiving multi-temporality and relational dynamics between time and eternity". It is at this point that there is a strong link between Jackelén's theology of time and Jenson's Trinitarian understanding of God's relationship to time and eternity. Both agree that God should not be viewed as merely timeless and that the timeless and temporal eternities of God are no longer mutually exclusive. Jackelén (2005: 99) mentions that the two belong together "... because God, based on the concrete event of God's temporal self-revelation, is seen in Trinitarian differentiation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and, correspondingly, God's relationship to time should also be viewed in a Trinitarian manner [...]". They thus both agree that in the complexity of who God is, timelessness and temporality will be in a relation. They, however, disagree on how this is the case, with Jenson describing God's time/eternity as "temporal infinity" and linking the different temporal times with the different persons in the Trinity, and Jackelén preferring the term "multi-temporality" and seeking in the Trinity a unity of timelessness and multi-temporality. She follows the theologian Ingolf Dalferth's suggestion that the differences are expressed as the timeless eternity of God the Creator, the multi-temporality eternity of the Spirit, and the temporality of the Son. By contrast, Jenson links the past to the Father, the future to the Spirit and the specious present to the Son. With no anticipated compromise between the two, it is no surprise that the "arbitrary" assigning of aspects of the Trinity to various aspects of time/eternity is one of Jackelén's biggest problems with the Trinitarian model.<sup>26</sup>

Without going into too much detail concerning the differences between Jenson and Jackelén, it is important to note their attempt to revise (or rather to dismiss) the understanding of God as timeless, but simultaneously not to understand God as completely temporal.

26 Jackelén (2005: 109) states: "The question still remains whether the assigning of aspects of the Trinity to various aspects of time/eternity can occur only more or less arbitrarily or whether tenable criteria for such an assignment can be formulated."

Jenson maintains less the difference between God and creation and might be guilty, as many of his criticisms suggest, of mixing time and eternity by eternalising time and temporalising eternity.<sup>27</sup> Jackelén, on the other hand, emphasises the eschatological difference between old and new and mentions that the ontological difference between eternity and time should be interpreted from that basis and not *vice versa*.<sup>28</sup> Within the Trinitarian model she is able to differentiate eternity and time, and still allows eternity to encompass the entire course of history. For Jackelén and Jenson eternity is thus not merely opposed to time, but positively related to it, embracing it in its totality.<sup>29</sup> In this instance she agrees with Wolfhart Pannenberg (1991: 408) who states: "... the true Infinite [...] is not just opposed to the finite but also embraces the antithesis". At this point one should ask whether Jenson's and Jackelén's understanding of God and time/eternity is philosophically tenable. Are their understanding of time and their Trinitarian link with temporality and eternity logically coherent, and do they sufficiently deal with critique that is normally given to this viewpoint? In answering these questions one needs to understand the broader philosophical debate about time and eternity. Prior to that one should discuss an opposite viewpoint to those of Jenson and Jackelén, namely the understanding of God as timeless. This article will discuss the reasons why classical theism understood God as timeless.<sup>30</sup>

27 For example, Jenson (1995: 40) mentions: "Time [...] is the accommodation God makes in his living and moving eternity, for others than himself."

28 Jackelén follows the theologian Dalferth's formulation in this instance: "God is related to creation, in triune fashion, as a differentiated unity of Father, Spirit, and Son: as the timeless foundation of everything, as the multi-temporal companion of everyone, and as the temporal mediator of salvation in the specific life-time of Jesus Christ and of all who believe in him. God's eternity is the epitome of these time relationships and cannot be identified with any one of them as such" (Jackelén 2005: 100).

29 This is, of course, reconcilable with Jenson's notion of *theosis*.

30 Classical theism can, according to Kim (2010: 61), be "... attributed to the traditional concept of God, which was mainly formulated in the period from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas". Katherine Rogers (2007: 5) states that "... classical theism has come to mean the view that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent [...] simple and immutable".

### 3. God's timelessness in 'classical theism'

In classical theism, God is conceived as a timeless Being, who exists totally outside of time and has no temporal duration.<sup>31</sup> The reason why classical theists see God as timeless is because time is understood in the category of change and movement and these characteristics (change, motion) cannot be applied to God as the most perfect Being, because change would imply improvement or decay.<sup>32</sup> In Anselm's view, for example, if God exists in time, then He must be temporally composite, temporally contained, and subject to temporal change, but the simple God cannot be so. Since God is supremely simple and immutable and eternity is nothing but His essence, it is timeless. Therefore God is timelessly eternal in the sense that He exists absolutely outside of time. Kim (2010: 100) concludes thus that "... the concept of absolute timeless eternity is basically constituted according to the Greek ontological paradigm: the Perfect Being – simplicity – immutability – timeless eternity".

God's timelessness is further derived in classical theism from the concepts of divine omnipresence and omniscience. All these doctrines are inseparably interrelated and are the irreducible divine attributes in classical theism. In Thomas Aquinas's theology, in particular, one finds the logical and ontological basis of God's eternity in God's simplicity and immutability. For Aquinas (as for Anselm)<sup>33</sup>

- 31 Nash (1983:21) describes this kind of timelessness of the classical theism as follows: "It means that God exists totally outside of time; that is, God has neither temporal duration nor temporal location. God does not exist at any particular moment of time and His existence does not occur during any period of time. He is 'outside' of time. For a timeless God, all time exists in one eternal present; there is no past or future for God."
- 32 For a historical background to the conception of God's timeless eternity in classical theism (traced through the Neo-Platonists, Plato and up to Parmenides, and also through Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas), cf Kim 2010: 61-102. I will follow much of Kim's description in my discussion here.
- 33 There is an interesting difference between Aquinas and Anselm. According to Feinberg's (2001: 384) analysis, "... whereas Anselm moves from God's perfection to his eternity in *Proslogium* and from God's simplicity directly to his eternity in the *Monologium*, Aquinas's basic line of thought moves from simplicity to immutability and from immutability to timeless eternity".



God's simplicity entails His immutability, and His immutability entails His eternity. Therefore, God necessarily exists outside of time and for God all time exists in one eternal now. Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas have maintained this view of timeless eternity. Recent advocates of this view are Paul Helm and Brian Leftow, among others.<sup>34</sup>

Classical theism's view of God's timeless eternity emphasises the absolute transcendence of God over the temporal world. It does succeed in maintaining the difference between God and creation, but it does not allow a positive relation between God and time. The problem is that God becomes the other (denial) of time and the question arises as to how can God positively relate to the temporal world if he is the "denial" of time? In other words, if the eternal God exists absolutely outside of time, how can God relate to human time? This question led to diverse answers to supporters of the timelessness of God – from Anselm's notion of "supertime" to Brian Leftow's notion of "typical temporal properties".<sup>35</sup> These answers will not be discussed in this instance, because they do not form part of the scope of this article. The problem of God's timelessness (or "temporality", according to Jenson and Jackelén) in the broader philosophical and scientific debate about time and eternity will now be discussed. It is hoped that this will help us to better understand and evaluate Jenson and Jackelén's proposals.

34 Paul Helm's view will be partly discussed in this article, but for more on Leftow's views see his "Time and eternity" (1991), "The eternal present" (2002) and "Eternity" (2003).

35 In his essay "The eternal present", Brian Leftow (2002) defends the coherence of the claim that God is not temporal yet is present. He introduces the idea of a typically temporal property (TPP) and argues that "... there is in fact a continuum of possible views of God's relation to time" (Leftow 2002: 23) and that even most of those who hold God is eternal think God's life has some TPP's. Leftow's argument cannot be explained in this instance, but for a discussion on it, cf Manson 2005.

#### 4. Contemporary philosophical and scientific debates on the nature of time

It is impossible to give a full account of the contemporary philosophical and scientific debates on the nature of time within the scope of this article. Rather the contemporary analytic philosophical understanding of time and some insights gained in this debate from the natural sciences about the nature of time will be discussed.<sup>36</sup> In brief, the consensus is, to a certain extent, that time is conceived as “change”, and “the debate is whether the nature of time is dynamic (tensed) or static (tenseless)” (Kim 2010: 11). This debate is important (also for this article’s argument), because some of the most powerful arguments against the timeless eternity of God originate from the analytic philosophical conception of the nature of time. In philosophical theology, the debate on the nature of time is thus very significant for our understanding of God’s eternity and its relation to time. Kim (2010: 10) explains that “there are two competitive theories of time, the tenseless (static, B-series) and the tensed (dynamic, A-series) theory of time”. He adds that some philosophers and theologians argue that the traditional conception of God’s timeless eternity is only consistent without any serious problems with the tenseless (static) theory of time (for example, Paul Helm), while others argue that the tensed (dynamic) theory of time is correct and that God is therefore temporal (for example, Jackelén). In this debate time is conceived as “change”; in other words, they debate whether the nature of time is dynamic (tensed) or static (tenseless). For a better understanding of this debate this article will analyse

36 Jackelén (2005: 121-81) devotes a chapter on “Time in the formulation of scientific theory” to the current scientific debate on the nature of time. By contrast, Jenson does not make any parallel to the scientific understanding of time in his theology. Eunsoo Kim (2010: 103-45) also devotes a chapter to the contemporary philosophical and scientific debates about the nature of time. I will follow mainly Kim’s exposition in my argument.

and summarise the main conceptions of the two competitive theories, and briefly discuss some aspects of the nature of time.<sup>37</sup>

The tenseless (static or B-series) theory of time can be summarised as follow (Kim 2010: 112): Time itself is real, but our experience of the flow of time is a mere mind-dependent illusion. Notions of past, present and future are subjective properties and not ontological or objective reality. All times – past, present and future – are essentially and equally real and this leads to determinism for the future. The A-determinants (pastness, presentness and futurity) are not essential to understanding the reality of time, but rather the realities lie in the B-relations of time as earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than. The tenseless (static or B-series) theory of time has been generally supported by a metaphysical rejection of the objective reality of temporal becoming; scientific arguments from the deterministic interpretation of Einstein's special theory of relativity, and arguments from the tenseless theory of linguistic-analytic philosophy.

By contrast, the tensed (dynamic or A-series) theory of time has the following essential tenets (Kim 2010: 120-1). Time itself is real and the idea of temporal becoming, the flow of time, is not a mere mind-dependent illusion, but an ontologically objective reality of the world. The existence at "now" is only real (presentism), for the past has ceased to exist and the future does not yet exist. The A-determinants (pastness, presentness and futurity) are essential to understanding the reality of time, for there are ontological differences between the temporal properties. The tensed (dynamic or A-series) theory of time has been supported by the metaphysical understanding of the objective reality of temporal becoming; arguments from the indeterministic interpretation of Einstein's special theory of relativity; arguments from the tensed theory of linguistic-analytic philosophy, and arguments for the "arrow of time" in thermodynamics, quantum physics, cosmology, biology, and causation theory.

37 There are very diverse concepts and competitive theories and explanations in conceiving the nature of time. *Cf.*, for example, Strauss 2010. However, the focus in this instance will only be on the tenseless (static) and the tensed (dynamic) theories of time.

Which theory is correct between the tenseless (static) and the tensed (dynamic) theory of time? The philosopher Michael Tooley (1997: 13) points out that it is "... the most fundamental question in the philosophy of time". Unfortunately, there is as yet no consensus between these two rival theories. As far as Antje Jackelén's theology of time is concerned, she chose a relational and dynamic understanding of time. This conception of time is a choice for the tensed (dynamic or A-series) theory of time. Jackelén did not, however, make her choice on arbitrary grounds, but argued that her position was the best supported by the scientific theory of time: "... neither Newton nor Einstein could explain time definitively. Quantum physics and chaos theory add greater meaning to the concepts of relation, dynamics and openness [...]" (Jackelén 2005: 181). This openness of time, in particular, is very important for Jackelén and is so meaningful from a theological perspective. Jackelén's acceptance of a dynamic and relational understanding of the nature of time is also in line with philosophers and theologians such as Padgett, Yates, and Craig.<sup>38</sup> They, and others like Eunsoo Kim,<sup>39</sup> hold a relational-dynamic conception of time. Jackelén is also in line with Kim in that she focuses on objective (real) and relational time and not on subjective and absolute time.<sup>40</sup> By contrast to absolute time (Newtonian), the conception of the nature of time as relational understands time not as something in itself for it cannot be separated from concrete changes occurring in it. According to the relational view of time, time is not identical with change but comes from our awareness of time in the changes of things. Time is thus the "form of the relationship between beings (things) and events, and with other beings" (Kim 2010: 139). Jackelén's understanding of time (influenced by Ricoeur) as something

38 Cf Padgett 1992: 82-121, Yates 1990: 95 and Craig 1978: 497-503.

39 Cf Kim 2010: 137.

40 Kim (2010:137) cites Bunge who classifies the four possible consistent theories of time as: AS – time is Absolute and Subjective (Kant), AO – time is Absolute and Objective (Newton), RS – time is Relative and Subjective (Berkeley), RO – time is Relative and Objective (Lucretius). Bunge prefers the relational-objective view of time and insists that time is not out there, by itself and ready-made, as the absolute view of time had it: time is in making alongside happenings.

that must be narrated and as something that cannot be abstracted, but occurs instead as lived time, suits the dynamic and relational view of time described in this instance.<sup>41</sup> It can thus be concluded that Jackelén's and, by implication, Jenson's understanding of the nature of time can be regarded as philosophically logically coherent within the tensed view of time.

As mentioned earlier, the choice for a tenseless (static) theory of time is consistent with the traditional conception of God's timeless eternity, while the choice of the tensed (dynamic) theory of time as correct is consistent with God as temporal. The different choices have considerably different implications. However, with their choice of the tensed view, Jackelén and Jenson do not accept God as completely temporal – as Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, does – but specified the type of temporality in God.<sup>42</sup> Those who accept the tenseless view of time and the timelessness of God state the dangers (or problems) of accepting God as totally temporal. The philosopher Paul Helm is a good contemporary example. His position in this debate will be briefly discussed in order to understand some of the potential weaknesses in Jenson's and Jackelén's position.

## 5. A contemporary understanding of God's timelessness – Paul Helm

The following question arises: If time is tensed, should we discard the classical conception of God's eternity? In recent theological discussions on the issue there are mainly four possible options concerning the relationship between God's eternity and human

- 41 Kim (2010: 144) explains that "... in the tensed theorists' view, it is an absurd idea that a concrete person (or object) and its history are different. In this sense a tensed theorist, D. Lewis, recently insisted, that the tenseless view of the temporal parts theory of personal identity cannot be reconciled with the moral agent. He says that, 'if the tenseless view is correct, there are no agents which persist while performing any action.'"
- 42 In his well-known article, "God everlasting" (1975) and more recently in "Unqualified divine temporality" (2001) Wolterstorff clearly asserts that the biblical God is not eternal in the timeless sense, but temporal, and therefore everlasting.

time: “absolute timelessness” (Helm 2001); “everlastingness” (Wolterstorff 1975); “relative timelessness” (Padgett 1992), and “accidental temporalism” (Craig 1978).<sup>43</sup> Although many theologians and philosophers have recently criticised and rejected the idea of atemporality of divine eternity for many reasons, it is still advocated on the philosophical basis of the tenseless view of time with other theological reasons.<sup>44</sup> Paul Helm (2001: 29), one of the most rigorous advocates in this regard, states: “God exists ‘outside’ time”.<sup>45</sup> According to Helm (2001: 34), biblical data do not directly support either eternalism or temporalism, and God’s timeless eternity comes rather from the following three basic theological arguments: the idea of the divine fullness or self-sufficiency (aseity); the Creator-creature distinction, and the conclusion of the cosmological argument for God’s existence. These considerations need to be taken into account when one opts for the temporal view of God.

Helm is aware of the critique against the timeless view of God, which asks how God’s action of the temporal world can be explained. For example: Does this temporal act not change God’s mode of existence to temporal? Helm’s answer is that God’s creation of the universe is not a temporal event, nor was there a temporal starting-point for the universe to exist because it is co-eternal with God. Thus, for him, “God has a timelessly eternal relation with the temporal world, but a relation that is nevertheless contingent” (Helm 2001: 49). Helm

43 For a discussion of the different possibilities, cf Ganssle’s *God and time: four views* (2001).

44 Brian Davies (1983: 215) summarises several major objections to God’s timelessness as follows: “1. If God is timeless He cannot be a person. 2. If God is timeless, his knowledge entails absurd consequences or is restricted. 3. If God is timeless, he cannot act. 4. If God is timeless, he cannot command our admiration or love. 5. There is Biblical precedent for rejecting the view that God is timeless. 6. There is no good reason for supposing that if there is a God, then he is timeless”.

45 Paul Helm is a strong representative of the contemporary view of God’s timelessness. He “... and Brian Leftow hold fast to the timelessness of God” (Jackelén 2005: 83). Cf, for example, Paul Helm’s *Eternal God: a study of God without time* (1988) and “Divine timeless eternity” (2001).

(2001: 53) thus explains God's action in the world as the temporal effects of his eternal will:

As an analogy we may think of a person's action in setting the timer on her central heating system. This is (we may suppose) one action, analogous to God's eternal willing. But this one action has numerous temporally scattered effects, analogous to the effects in time of God's eternal act of willing.

Although Helm does try in this analogy to answer this main critique against the timelessness of God, there are still many other critiques against this opinion. One is the inner incoherence regarding the problem of "simultaneity"; another is the implied immutability and impassibility that is implied by divine timeless eternity, and another is that many temporalists assert that a timelessly eternal God cannot be omniscient because he cannot know what time is "now". For Kim (2010: 158), one of the "... most implausible thoughts is that, as Helm says, the temporal world itself is co-eternal with the eternal God in tenseless sense. If [...] God created the world *ex nihilo*, how then can the world be co-eternal with the Creator?"

Helm's understanding of God as timeless succeeds thus in emphasising the absolute transcendence of God the Creator beyond the world, but Helm lacks in describing a positive and real relationship of God with his creatures and a positive relation of God to time. Of course, this is a very brief survey of Helm's view, but the implication for the present study about Jenson's and Jackelén's understanding of God and time is that Helm's insistence on the timelessness of God does not necessarily make Jenson's and Jackelén's view invalid or wrong. The opposite is rather true, because it indicates how Jenson's and Jackelén's view of God and eternity is an attempt to overcome the type of critique that is offered against the timeless view of God. It can thus be concluded that, in this sense, Jenson's and Jackelén's view is philosophically and theologically tenable. However, the critique of the timeless view of God (as presented by Helm) against the temporalists should be raised against Jenson's and Jackelén's view in order to determine how convincing it is. In this regard it can be mentioned that Jenson rather than Jackelén will find it difficult to

answer the two theological motivations for God's timeless eternity, namely the idea of the divine fullness or self-sufficiency (aseity), and the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>46</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The question explored in this article is whether Jenson's and Jackelén's understanding of the relationship between God and time (as "temporal infinity" and as relational/dynamic) is logically coherent and philosophically and theologically tenable. My answer to this question is yes, but not an unqualified yes. On the positive side of my answer I must emphasise the creative space and possibilities their theologies offer to the understanding of the nature of time, as well as the relation between God and eternity. Trinitarian theology, in particular, has the ability to accommodate the tension between God and time/eternity in a relational way. Jackelén's (2005: 109) words make sense: "Trinitarian models enable us to conceive of multi-temporality and relational dynamics between time and eternity". Jenson used this possibility to accommodate the different poles of time within the Trinity and to connect them to the different persons in the Trinity.<sup>47</sup> Jackelén's (2005: 109) critique is, however, valid: "The question still remains

46 I mentioned earlier that Jenson is often criticised for failing to maintain the distinction between Creator and creation. Jenson also identifies the second person of the Trinity, the Son Jesus, so completely with the church (as *totus Christus*) – cf my forthcoming article, Trinity, time and ecumenism in Robert Jenson's theology, *Nederduits Gereformeerde Theologische Tydskrif*, 2011, 52(1&2) – that the critique of not maintaining God's aseity or self-sufficiency can be lodged against him. Jackelén, on the other hand, tries to maintain this distinction between God and world in her eschatological model.

47 By contrast to Jenson's effort, the classical theists tried to avoid locating time in the "simple" God. Eunsoo Kim mentions that the problem with classical theism is its one-sided emphasis on the absolute difference between time and eternity because of the unity of God (*Deo Uno*). He therefore suggests that "a positive relationship between God's eternity and time, along with the qualitative difference between them, can be fully conceived in Trinitarian thinking (*Deo Trino*)" (Kim 2010: 102).



whether the assigning of aspects of the Trinity to various aspects of time/eternity can occur only more or less arbitrarily [...]”<sup>48</sup>

Another positive aspect of Jenson’s and Jackelén’s proposals is that they shift the understanding of the nature of time as “change” to “life”.<sup>49</sup> Jenson allocates this “life” to the *perichoresis* of the Trinity and Jackelén focuses more on its relational aspect. As far as the advantages of relational time are concerned, she states that

it does not tolerate a flattening of time into the simple infinity of a super-continuity or a total synchronicity in which everything is available non-stop. In a relational understanding of time, time is conceived as “time for,” which always stands in relation to an Other (Jackelén 2005: 229).

This understanding of the nature of time as life provides a more open view on the future and includes a possible relation between God and creation. Jackelén can therefore speak about the future as “dance with God” and Jenson uses a similar metaphor for the future, namely music – a fugue.<sup>50</sup> Both metaphors include time as

- 48 It must, however, be mentioned that the Trinitarian model remains a good model to incorporate the tensions. A recent good example is that of Eunsoo Kim (2010: 2) who develops a “... Trinitarian analogical understanding of God’s eternity and its relation to time [...] a kind of *via analogia* through the following Trinitarian triple analogy, *analogia vitae*, *analogia relationis*, and *analogia communicationis*, centred in the [...] God given analogy, Jesus Christ [...]”.
- 49 This notion has revealed various theological possibilities and Kim (2010: 341), for example, also works with “... a biblical and theological conception of the nature of time as life against the philosophical conception of the nature of time as change.”
- 50 Jackelén (2005:174-5) states “... openness to the future based on unpredictability does not therefore essentially cancel the determination by the initial conditions [...] The static idea of a cosmology with an infinitely uniform flow of time by no means corresponds to this scenario, which is represented more adequately by the image of a dance [...]” and “... a possible story of time [...] is the narration of time as dance [...] This flexibility and openness is simultaneously also its weakness [...]” (Jackelén 2005: 230). Jenson’s metaphor is that of music. He mentions that “... the final word about God is that he is beautiful, and that as he is the biblical God, who is Whence and Whither, he is beautiful with the kind of beauty that music has. Indeed, I proposed that he is beautiful with the kind of beauty that a certain *kind* of music has. The last word about

well as a playfulness, an openness. This “open theology” of both affirms Polkinghorne’s understanding that “different accounts of the nature of time will be consonant with different theological understandings” (Polkinghorne 2006: 982). Jenson and Jackelén work thus (in the terms of Polkinghorne 2006) with a “universe of becoming”, instead of a “block universe”. The question remains, however, how much Jenson and Jackelén should be regarded as implicated by their views as “open theists” or “process theologians”.

Another positive remark about Jenson’s and Jackelén’s proposals about God’s eternity/time is that they are in agreement that a very static, distant, closed, timeless eternal and transcendent concept of God is not at all consistent with the biblical teaching. Jenson reached this conclusion from arguing from the narrative of God (and from God’s Trinity), whereas Jackelén reached this conclusion from arguing from the narrative of various Christian hymns’ description of God. Both emphasise very consistently a personal, dynamic, relational, open, temporally everlasting and immanent concept of God. They both assert that this is a more biblical concept of God. Jackelén also adds that this is a more logical and scientifically consistent concept of God.

A final positive remark about Jenson and Jackelén is that they both, in the development of their theologies, do not first adhere to the analytical philosophical theories of time, which essentially conceive of time as change. Jenson does not discuss the philosophical options of tenseless or tensed views on time in his theology, but works with a Trinitarian concept and develops his entire theology in reaction to the influence of the Greek philosophers’ view of God’s timelessness. Jackelén also does not develop her theology of time primarily from a philosophical perspective, but from Christian hymns and the nature of time as life.

Although, in my opinion, Jenson’s and Jackelén’s conceptions of the nature of time can thus be regarded, to a large extent, as

God, I said, is that he is a great fugue, of Father, Son, and Spirit. So the last word about us is this: the end is music” (Kim 2002: 41-2).

philosophically tenable, in particular for those who agree on their acceptance of the dynamic understanding of time,<sup>51</sup> both Jenson's and Jackelén's proposals will probably receive a great deal of critique from orthodox theology. Some of these critiques have already been mentioned in the separate discussions of Jenson and Jackelén. The most important one will be mentioned in this instance. The Patristic Fathers and the Reformers (and Karl Barth) always emphasised the difference between God and his creatures, God and his creation, God and time. They argued that for God to be God (Biblically), this distinction needs to be maintained. The problem is that by understanding God as temporal, God will thus be like his creatures, like his creation, and therefore there exists a strong traditional theological argument that God is timeless despite recent developments.<sup>52</sup> This problem reveals two further problems. The first problem is God's relationship to his creation. With a temporalist view God is often understood in pantheistic terms and even Jenson is often accused of "pantheism" and even "pan-en-trinitarianism".<sup>53</sup> This also leads to issues concerning God's aseity or self-sufficiency. The second problem is God's relationship to the future. "Temporalists"

- 51 Of course, the debate between the tenseless and tensed views has not yet been concluded. It is also necessary to analyse Jenson's and Jackelén's understandings of God and eternity in terms of the three remaining possible options concerning the relationship between God's eternity and human time, namely "everlastingness" (Wolterstorff), "relative timelessness" (Padgett), and "accidental temporalism" (Craig). My findings on their conceptions of time and eternity are thus preliminary and further research on this point might be a fruitful enterprise for the future.
- 52 Recent development includes, for example, efforts by Karl Barth who uses the term "pure duration" to speak of God's time, which means all time (past, present and future) is "simultaneous" in God. By contrast, "human time" is for Barth "successiveness". Barth (1960: 521) tries not to view God as timeless: "His eternity is not merely the negation of time, but an inner readiness to create time, because it is supreme and absolute time, and therefore the source of our time, relative time". This concept of "pure duration" is, however, according to Jenson, still too much linked to timelessness than to temporality.
- 53 Mark Mattes (2000: 484), for example, states: "The logic of Jenson's view of God is led by a conceptual commitment to a 'pan-en-trinitarianism' in which all histories are called to their fulfilment by the very life of the triune God finding itself in, with, and under these histories".

such as Jenson and Jackelén can easily be understood as “open theists” or “process theologians” who assert, based on their understanding of God and time, that God does not know the future. Although this might not necessarily be a philosophical problem, it does reveal a whole new wave of critique within the theology about God’s omniscience and God’s omnipotence.<sup>54</sup>

Jenson’s and Jackelén’s proposals about the relationship between God and eternity/time emphasise the complex relation between “timelessness, Trinity and temporality”. This complexity can, however, be viewed in a positive way, because in this complexity lie possibilities for a more creative understanding of God’s time than that of classical theism. It appears to me that the direction of relating God and time is from timelessness to Trinity to temporality.

54 The philosopher Richard Rice (2007) discusses, for example, Jenson’s theology as an example of open theism in a very positive light. *Cf* also his positive view of open theism (Rice 2000).

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