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GOD'S ETERNITY, GOD'S TEMPORALITY, AND TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

1. Preliminary Remarks About a New Mode of Dialogue Between Theology and Science

In 1993 the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton sponsored a four-year consultation in which a highly interdisciplinary group (including the fields of cosmology, physics, chemistry, biology, environmental studies, philosophy, religious studies and theology) moved

- from an exchange over different disciplinary and individual approaches to the dialogue between science and theology
- to the discussion of religious topics of common interest and, finally,
- to a progressive specification of common theological and epistemological grounds of discourse.

So for the second year the notion of Divine activity was selected and discussed in a multitude of perspectives. For the third year the notion of the temporality of God's action in the world was chosen, to gain more specificity. Finally, the consultation centered on the two topics: eternity and temporality and eternity and contingency in God's acting in the World.

This persistent drive toward a specifically theological topic and interface of the dialogue was new and exciting for many of us. Up to this time I had witnessed several constellations of dialogue which were more or less far away from the interest in a genuinely *theological* focus. I had had the chance to participate in forms of discourse which worked on historical questions concerning the relation of science and theology, on ethical concerns, on general methodological reflections or on the endeavor to test a certain philosophy (particularly the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead) as a potential interface for dialogue. With one exception (in a discourse in the field of sociobiology) in these cases the inner complexity of theological topics and forms of thought had not had a chance to have an impact on the discourse or to get shaped by the discourse. It was rather a religiously shaped common sense, sometimes enlightened by popularized philosophical modes of thought, that was the real partner of the dialogue. The Princeton discourse was different

– there was an eagerness on the part of many scientists to engage some theological complexity. And there was some willingness on the theological side not to overrule scientific insights into reality by metaphysical presuppositions. In my judgement, this made for a new and exciting climate of discourse.

Although all the participants of this conference were explicitly quite excited about the fruitful discourse in the midst of the challenges caused by the different forms and styles of thought, the discourse finally ran into one tension that ceased to be fruitful after a while. This led to a constellation that made some of us interested in a differentiation of the group - not in a split, but in a differentiation into two subgroups to work more efficiently. To use short and snappy terms: We split in a "bottom-up-approach-group" and a "top-down-approach-group". The bottom-up-approach-group tried to compare and improve a primarily inductive procedure, both in theology and science, and to investigate commonalities and differences of their tasks and approaches. The top-down-approach-side tried to defend and to optimize a specific theistic metaphysics as a common ground for theological and scientific orientation. The top-down-approach group had a stronger interest in the apologetic task and it was also stronger in the approach to a religious common sense which asks for some *unity* of science and religion. The bottom-up-approach was, in my view and that of some others, more explorative, more willing to look for both, *commonalities and fruitful differences* between scientific and theological approaches toward reality. Interestingly enough, it was not the case that all Roman Catholics or all Philosophers of Religion stayed with the top down approach.

In the Gifford Lectures of 1993/94, the theoretical physicist and Anglican theologian John Polkinghorne asserted "that many theologians are instinctively top-down thinkers." He cautions: We in the natural sciences "have learned so often in our own explorations of the physical world that 'evident general principles' are often neither so evident nor so general as one might at first sight have supposed."¹ He thus advocates inquiring whether and how the great theological speculations consistently reflect "what we know of the process and history of the present world." This approach corresponds not only to the scientifically fruitful initiative of modern thinking, but

¹ John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist. Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker*. The Gifford Lectures for 1993-94, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994, 4, cf. 4ff.

also to the origins of Reformation thinking that in 1518 already connected the demand for a binding of all theology back to Scripture with the planning of an anti-Scholastic reform of universities and scholarly disciplines. But how can this approach become fruitful in the area of trinitarian theology, which seems to be the most obvious example of incurable top-down speculation in theology?² It was quite a complex set of discussions in the Princeton consultations that pushed my thinking in a direction that allows for a bottom-up approach in trinitarian theology.

2. A Critique of the Abstract Opposition of Time and Eternity

In this century, the efforts to overcome the abstract opposition of God and time, of eternity and temporality and to conceive the connection of God's eternity and God's temporality belonged to the great projects of theology and the humanities. This project aimed at ending a long and significant tradition. Influenced above all by Plato, classic theologians from Augustine to Schleiermacher maintained that God was beyond time, that whereas creation was essentially temporal, God is essentially timeless. In the 19th and 20th centuries, philosophers like Hegel and Whitehead drew attention to the various problems connected with this assertion. In the twentieth century, such diverse theological schools as dialectical theology and process theology agreed in their efforts to free God and the theological concept of eternity "from the Babylonian captivity of

2 Trinitarian theology has been practised as an enterprise of explicitly theological and even scholarly theological reconstruction and construction of the concept of God. It has been exercised as an attempt to grasp God by concepts, to penetrate and understand connections of metaphors, images, sequences of images and stories in order to disclose the vivacity and the secrets of the Godhead. Thus theology is here understood as "image thinking" (Austin Ferrer, John McIntyre, Ingolf Dalferth), as an unfolding and fathoming of images in which Christian faith expresses itself and opens up the world and experience for itself. Whereas trinitarian theology has been quite successful in warding off theological errors and heresies, particularly in the Early Church, in my opinion its constructive contributions have so far been relatively modest. Quite contrary to the assertion expressed again and again that trinitarian theology is the center of dogmatics, and that all the dogmatic parts are, or should at least be, stamped and penetrated by this differentiated doctrine of God, the existing trinitarian theologies offer a different picture. They either dogmatize very meagre or completely vague basic ideas of God (e.g., "relationality", "sociality", "unity and plurality"), or in reductionist ways introduce anthropological phenomena or figures of thought into the doctrine of God and into the overall connections of Systematic theology, such as the important, but from a trinitarian point of view insufficient, experience of an encounter of two persons ("I" - "Thou") as aspects of the relation of interpersonal love. Or, completely docetic, drift above human experiences and the wealth of experiences of God expressed in the Biblical traditions. The fact that thus they often used religious symbols in more or less open, conscious or unconscious ways to strengthen patriarchal or other ideological views of the world can be demonstrated by numerous examples.

an abstract opposite to the concept of time."³

This, however, is more easily planned than done. We cannot maintain that so far theology and "neo-classical metaphysics" have reached new consolidated positions.⁴

Among the most puzzling, and the most pressing, of general questions about God are those concerned with how (God) is to be understood to relate to time. It is clear that there must be an eternal pole to the divine nature. God's steadfast love can't be subject to fluctuation if God is worthy of being called divine. Emphasis on this alone would lead us to a static picture of God, but could that be true if the nature of love is relatedness and that to which God relates, namely God's creation, is itself subject to radical change?⁵

This description of the problem makes it clear that to renounce a conception of God's eternity cannot be the answer to the problem.

The biblical traditions conflict with an abstract opposition of God and time, of God's eternity and temporality, when they speak of God's life or God's knowledge, of God's deciding or intending action and also of God's revelation in the earthly, crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. All such statements challenge us to give up to the "Babylonian captivity" of our thinking about God, to give up the abstract opposition of God's eternity and temporality. After what we have said, a way out of this dilemma, however, can only be offered by a convincing concept of God's eternity which permits us both to differentiate eternity from creaturely temporality and to relate eternity to creaturely temporality.

Karl Barth offered a solution to the problem by postulating a metaphysical doubling of the past-present-future structure of time, by calling this "super-time" ("pre-temporality, trans-temporality, post-temporality") God's "eternity" and by identifying it with God's own self. "Pre-temporality, super-temporality [or trans-temporality], and post-temporality are equally God's eternity and

3 *Karl Barth*, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), II/1.611..

4 Following Paul Helm, Ingolf Dalferth has characterized this difficult situation by pointing out the unhappy alternative: If the relation of the creative God to the temporal world can be grasped as temporal, then this either possibly calls into question the coherence of the concept of God and, as Dalferth puts it, thus God's existence, since God cannot be temporally copresent in single events which in their turn are temporally ordered. God would fall into the temporal paradox of being at the same time earlier and later than God is. Or the temporal understanding of God's relation to creation calls into question the temporal structure of the world, since from God's copresence with temporally different events the copresence of the non-copresent, the copresence of yesterday and tomorrow, would result. Cf. Ingolf Dalferth, "Gott und Zeit", in Dieter Georgi et al. (eds.), *Religion und Gestaltung der Zeit*, Kampen 1994, 13. Cf. also Paul Helm, *Eternal God. A Study of God Without Time*, Oxford 1988

5 *John Polkinghorne*, *The Faith of a Physicist*, 59.

therefore the living God himself."⁶ This starting point, however, can only satisfy those who are ready to accept a speculative top down construction that offers a paradoxical constellation, namely, God's identification with and God's opposition to the totalized "almighty time" (Hegel). On the one hand, Barth identifies God and eternity with an infinite self-surpassing of time; on the other, he opposes God and eternity to totalized time. Thus he offers a paradoxical metaphysical construct. Those who do not like to start with vague notions of surpassing, pretended concepts of totality and paradoxes have to look for another way.

The alternative, however, which in the following we take up and try to develop further makes it necessary to call into question not only the abstract opposition of God and eternity over against time and temporality. It also forces us to call into question the *totalization and unification* of time, and thus to end a second famous tradition of thought. Since Aristotle and Augustine, "time" has been regarded as the universal condition of objective nature or as the universal form of human perception. Although in this century the power of clocks and watches and calendars has rather increased, scientific observations and discussions in the past decades have called into question this totalizing and unifying view of "time".

Ingolf Dalferth states convincingly: "Our explanations of time are proof that we do not only thematize time in different approaches to the same phenomenon, but, in fact, have our eye on different phenomena: the metric time of physics, the life rhythms of biology, psychology's systems of experiencing time, the processes of perception of our everyday consciousness, the symbolic order systems of sociology, the causal structures of procedure and a priori forms of perception in philosophy, the historical chronologies of historical disciplines, the differential relations between time and eternity in theology--they all, under the catchword "time", thematize problems whose diversity makes clear above all 'that "time" is no fixed idea without exception and unambiguous definiteness."⁷

Independently of the question (which still needs clarification) whether these phenomena and

6 Cf. Barth, KD II/1, 720, see also 700ff, with reference to Augustine's exegesis of the psalms.

7 Dalferth, *ibid.*, 15; quotation: H. Theissing, *Die Zeit im Bild*, Darmstadt 1987, 8. Translation M.W.

fields of phenomena have a common basic structure (e.g., J.T.E. McTaggart's B-series, that is the structures of a real "earlier" or "later" of events⁸), the start from a plurality of times and conceptions of times opens up new chances of a genuine theological handling of the problem with which we began; however, it confronts us with new difficulties as well. The new chances lie in the fact that starting from a plurality of times--a procedure open to a bottom-up approach--is in principle more appropriate to subtle everyday experience on the one side and to the biblical traditions on the other than starting from the imputation of the one time. However, at the same time, as James Barr has shown, the different conceptions of time in different experiential contexts raise great problems of translation from one into the other and of fine-tuning among each other.⁹ "If we have time" only as a vehicle of "orientation that can be formed in various ways and is historically changeable", as Norbert Elias put it¹⁰, this vehicle of orientation that threatens to become blurred in an immense abundance of phenomena ironically leads to a misleading abstraction. In my opinion, however, the insecurity caused by the observation of a plurality of times can be overcome, if--as Ingolf Dalferth has suggested¹¹--the meaning and function of the "ontological and eschatological differences of times" is taken into account. The meaning and function of the religious differentiations of "temporality and eternity" must be observed and more closely examined in connection with the differentiation of "the old times" and "the new times", the old and the new aeon. The religious difference between the old and the new time, the old and the new aeon enables us to grasp and to differentiate complex orders of the connections of the times.

In this enterprise, however, "eternity" or "the new time" must not again be perceived as concepts of mere abstract totality or as a basis for the development of abstract totalizing perspectives on "all times". Unfortunately, even Dalferth seems to suggest that.¹² Rather, we need to consider God's activity, God's formative powers more closely with regard to the times in order to understand from this starting point "eternity" and "the new time" in difference and in relation to

8 Cf. *McTaggart*, "The Unreality of Time", in: *Mind* XVII, 1908, 457ff.

9 *James Barr*, *Biblical Words For Time*, SCM Press: London 1962, esp. 105ff.

10 Cf. *Norbert Elias*, "Über die Zeit," in *M. Schröter* (ed.), *Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie II*, Frankfurt/M. 1988.

11 *Dalferth*, *Gott und Zeit*, 18ff.

12 Cf. the helpful differentiation between a "minimalist" and a "maximalist" concept of "eternity" in *Ted Peters*, *God as Trinity. Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*, Louisville 1993, 146ff.

merely creaturely times or "the old time".

3. God's Coordination of Times: The Creativity of the Triune God

The biblical traditions speak of a plurality of times "created" by God: times of the day, times of the year or seasons, individual times of life, social times of life, times of festivity etc. These times occasion a multiplicity of orders, orientations, and coordination of various processes of life which partly agree with each other, but partly do not. Rhythms of life structured by the times of the day and seasonal plannings for harvesting and for supplying food may be well adapted to the expected development of the vegetation. But individual and social structures of times of life--such as birth, love, illness, aging, death, and difficult developments--interfere with such attunements in ways that are by no means always fruitful and life-promoting. In some areas of space and time biographies and communal histories are blessed by a wonderful rhythmic coordination of climate and natural conditions, in others they are hindered in their development or even become destroyed.

If we intend to focus on this net of interferences constituted by the various times, it becomes clear that there is a constant necessity to connect and coordinate the various times. Continuities, simultaneities, and seasonabilities need to be ensured, made possible and realized in their coordination.

This coordination can only in a very limited way be guaranteed and looked after by human beings alone. A life-promoting coordination of creaturely times is improbable and continually jeopardized. Therefore a constant search for knowledge of the power and the potentials of the "fullness of times"--sometimes symbolized by "the heavens"--is necessary to further the relations of fruitful, good, ordered and at the same time creative connections of the most heterogeneous fields and phenomena of time. The creation account Genesis 1 speaks of divine and creaturely attunements of cosmological, biological, and cultural realms of phenomena and temporal

rhythms.¹³ In order to be able to cooperate in this coordination, human beings must be enabled to ask God--according to Genesis via the cult--in suitable ways for the creative coordination of times. For even where human beings themselves are not able to guarantee the interferences of times, these interferences do not happen without them and without their co-activities--nor without the co-activities of other creatures. In this process, human beings (and possibly also other creatures) do have numerous possibilities to misunderstand and hinder God's intentions. Under the condition of active and passive opposition by human beings God therefore makes Godself known through God's creative coordination of times.

This does by no means imply--as a theological misjudgment says that one constantly meets with--that God is automatically active and present in each and every place of space and time! God, by turning away God's face, by lowering or veiling it, as the Biblical texts say, can rather leave times to the destructive dynamics of creaturely misdevelopment. This does not mean that God has to leave certain realms of creaturely life and thus certain times to their own destructive power. All times are coram deo, but God is not automatically active and present in all of them. In order to grasp and to express this we should grasp God's relation to time as a living aggregation or relation of times which includes their fullness, but not their totality. In my opinion, this is exactly what is aimed at by the Biblical concepts of "eternity" and the critical differentiation of "the old aeon" and "the new aeon". The expression "eternity" is on the one hand used for extremely distant and removed times in the past and in the future ("from eternity to eternity"). On the other hand, it is used for the source and the resources of times which in the coordination of times make possible unfathomable duration and permanence. Since not all the times and all the coordinations of times correspond to God's will and God's intentions and will perhaps not even correspond to them in any possible future, and since many coordinations of times are mediated by creatures and thus do not automatically correspond to God's good will, it would be wrong to understand God's eternity as a priori related to all times.

13 Cf. *M. Welker*, What is "Creation?": Rereading Genesis 1 and 2, *Theology Today* 48, 1991, 56- 71; "Creation: Big Bang or the Work of Seven Days?," in *Theology Today* 52, 1995, 173-187; *Creation and Reality: Theological and Biblical Perspectives*, Warfield Lectures 1991/92, Fortress Press: Philadelphia 1998. TC ", Fortress Press: Philadelphia 1998."§

In any case, there are times that are "old", that will disappear or that are destined to vanish. There are times that work against God's actions and God's self-revelation in destructive and self-destructive ways and that therefore can at best further God's good plans with God's creation in unexplainable and unimaginable ways. But how can we know God's intentions with regard to structured finitude? How can we understand and explain the workings of the eternal God under the conditions of temporal finitude? I think that trinitarian theology starts out here and helps us to perceive the divine and the divine activity in the midst of finitude and at the same time to eliminate the idols and ideologies which mix with this perception. In the trinitarian differentiation we track God's creative, revealing and life-sustaining identity and power in the cooperation of God's modes of being or the so-called "persons" of the Trinity who each have traits of eternity and yet only together constitute God's fullness, pleroma, doxa, and eternal life.¹⁴

4. Three Chains or Wreaths of Metaphors Give Way to Speak of God's Eternal Life

In the Priestly creation account, it is remarkable that in the process of creation cosmological, biological and cultural rhythms and times are attuned to each other. These times, all of them times "below heaven", which quite decisively are determined by the orbits of the heavenly bodies, are once more differentiated from God's time, from the famous "seven days" of the Priestly creation account. Even here, it becomes clear that "creation" is not simply the arrangement of various times which can be measured by chronometers or other scientific achievements. In that the earth's own activity, human beings' interests in self-reproduction, and the problem of domination and preservation of the fellow-creatures are integrated into the process of creation, factors enter this process which make simple structures of preserving and securing "the eternal recourse of the same" appear insufficient from the point of view of creation theology.

14 It has been emphasized that the proper place for a trinitarian theology is doxology: the transition from the concentrated silence before God to the joyful and grateful, enthusiastic and glorifying adoration. I learned this first from *Dietrich Ritschl*, (*Zur Logik der Theologie. Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken*, Kaiser: München 1984, 178ff und 336ff). From Patrik Miller I learned, that a complementary discovery is needed, namely that trinitarian theology is to be located, too, in lamentation, in public petitionary prayer, and in the common quest after God's justice (theodicy). (Cf. His book: *They Cried to the Lord. The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1994, 68ff and 262ff.) This means that we have to take seriously God's liveliness, the divine revelation and the creative action not only in times and situations of life which are good, happy and freeing, but also in situations of life that are unhappy, enslaving, and crying for salvation and redemption. If we want to take the triune God seriously, we have to discover as the "Sitz im Leben" of trinitarian theology also prayer and invocation in crises and emergencies in the forms of lament and the question of theodicy.

In spite of this, the prevalent time structure of creation in the sense of the first article of faith seems to me to be stamped by this attunement of cosmological, biological and human-cultural times in the sense of preservation and the guarantee of rhythms and continuity, reciprocity and security of expectations. If in the thought of God "the creator" we abstract from the second and third articles of faith (which really is theologically inadmissible!), we have before us Gordon Kaufman's vague concept of the cosmic planner on a grand scale. The so-called "natural experience of God", which is not to be equalled with "natural theology", as Wolfhart Pannenberg has shown¹⁵, is frequently directed towards this God. This "natural experience of God" is vague, as Calvin clearly states in his *Institutio I,3*, or, as he puts it more pointedly, it is "vain and fleeing". Yet it is very powerful.¹⁶ William Stoeger has drawn attention to the fact that vague perspectives on the unity and directedness of natural laws try to pursue this idea of God that disregards God's revelation in Christ and in the activity of the Holy Spirit.

I am a little at a loss with regard to an appropriate term for a synthesizing form of time expressed in connection with and attunement to cosmological, biological and cultural times that allows for rhythm and continuity. With openness to a better phrasing, I would like to suggest that we speak of a *connection of times that can be universally measured*. Abstract theism with its strong interest to apply all sorts of abstract "omni"-quantors to the divine, obviously centered on this understanding of temporality. Abstracting from the other two articles of faith and the temporality expressed by them, this notion of God and time destroys not only trinitarian thought but also all notions of a living God. It leads to a confusion of eternity and infinity, or, as Hegel named it: "bad infinity" (*Schlechte Unendlichkeit*). In connection with the other articles of faith, however, this notion allows, as we shall see, for an understanding of the divine in a connection of three rich "wreaths of metaphors" that are found in the biblical traditions.

With regard to the second "person" or mode of being of the Trinity, a form of time becomes central that could be termed the *complex of historical times*. These temporal forms center on

15 W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Bd. 1, Göttingen 1988, 121ff.

16 Cf. *M. Welker*, *Creation and Reality: Theological and Biblical Perspectives*, Warfield Lectures 1991, Fortress Press: Philadelphia 1998, chapter 2.

specific events and complexes of events that shape and mark the course of a multitude of other events in particular ways. Its structure is irreversibility and past-present-future. For Christians, this time is decisively determined by the appearance and activity of Jesus of Nazareth, by the radiance of Jesu's post-Easterly life, and by the effects of this on church and world history. Old Testament traditions, however, emphasize that God's revelation in the Messiah is not the only way of God's self-historicization.

God's creative "eternity" makes itself known in the connection and mutual penetration of universally metricizable and reversible times and historical, biographical, irreversible times.¹⁷ Even if at times we tend to attribute the great constancies and rhythms to the true creator and keeper of "heaven and earth", we must not overlook the fact that God's truly creative and formative power cannot at all be conceived without the activity of the second mode of being of the triune God. If we abstract from the second and third modes of being, we do not overcome the region of ambiguous statements, e.g. that God lets the sun shine upon good and bad people alike. But: *Opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt!* (the external work of the Trinity is indivisible) It is only in the connection of universally metricizable and reversible times and historical, irreversible times which differentiate past, present and future that the creator and keeper of the universe acts upon God's creatures in a way called "creative", "ruling" and "guiding". And it is only in this *perichoresis of times* that the resurrected and exalted Christ acts as logos and mediator of creation, as the power of the living God in which all the promises are included.

The form of time of the third article is to be differentiated from both these forms of time, but it is irrevocably connected with them and stands in a differentiated unity with them. With regard to the metaphor of the "pouring out of the Spirit" we can clarify this form of time which already lies at the basis of the coordinations of each, the universally metricizable and reversible times and historical, irreversible times.¹⁸ Through the activity of the Spirit certain constellations of creatures are again and again torn from certain constancies and historical processes of development in

17 Cf. Friedrich Cramer, *Der Zeitbaum. Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Zeittheorie*, Frankfurt/M. 1996, bes. 61ff.

18 Cf. with regard to the "pouring" of the Spirit, M. Welker, *God the Spirit*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1994, 147ff and 228ff.

salvific ways, and led into new continuities and historical processes of development in corrective and healing manners. Through the Spirit the historical times do not only become "kairoi", fruitful and fulfilled times. Through the Spirit God's creative powers are mediated and become known as saving and renewing powers which without interruption act upon and through creatures. Life, which seemed destined to perish, is renewed. Where understanding seemed impossible, a new community is created. This is not only true of inner-creaturely relations. This is also true of the relations of creatures to God and to the divine life. Through the *overcoming power of the renewing and reviving times* of the Spirit creatures participate in God's eternal life, they are drawn into and become involved in this life.

Without the faithfulness and constancy in the activity of the first mode of being of the Godhead, without the clarity in the revelation of the identity and intentions of God in the second mode of being the reviving and renewing forces of the Spirit would be unrecognizable and could not be addressed. As it is, however, the dimension comes into view which Patrick Miller has presented impressively: God does not simply want to dispose of and dominate the creatures. God looks for a living relation to the creatures, a relation in which God is again and again invoked, persuaded, assailed and praised, asked in prayer, and glorified.¹⁹ In searching for and asking for God's living presence, but also in the experience of this presence, we come up with a third form of time, which, however, does not gain clear religious forms of expression without historical memory and cultic continuity. I would like to term this temporal form *the complex of salvific kairological times*. These times are not merely "inner-historical" phenomena. John Polkinghorne's article makes it clear at the end that also in a "purely cosmological" perspective certain *kairoi* can be named which are the condition of the qualified development of the universe as "creation".²⁰

Without the activity of the Spirit the cosmic, biological and cultural processes would remain subject to the connections which we call "simply natural". Without the activity of the Spirit we would not regard Christ's history as our history, it would remain foreign to us and external. The processes that bring about rhythms, continuity and security of expectations can be clearly

19 Patrick D. Miller, *Petitionary Prayer and the Question of God. The Perspective of Scripture*, Brueggemann-Festschrift ...

20 Natural Science, Temporality and Divine Action.

differentiated from those which lead to new directions through unexpected success, surprising agreement and an improbable coincidence of events. Yet we have to talk of "perichoretic connections" among them. We can state that each of God's creative acts is in principle marked by the activity of the Spirit. At the same time, we can differentiate the emphatic and explicit activity of the Spirit from God's creative and preserving activity. It is important to know that not "anything which is the case" is indebted to God's creative activity and the power of the Spirit. It is not each and every time that is automatically sustained and filled by God's eternity. There are also times which are rejected, destined to perish, "aging" and "old". This does not exclude the possibility that God can make new, creative and healing things come from them. Christian faith will, with regard to God's love revealed in Christ, even maintain that God wills no time to be left to its lostness forever, but, rather, that without fail God is intent on continually saving all creation.

There are *three wreaths of metaphors* which we will have to reconstruct in their consistencies and interdependences, which unfold the *perichoresis of the times in eternity*. The first wreath connects the first person or mode of being of the Trinity to the other persons or modes. That God the creator draws the metaphors of the king, that the biblical traditions speak of God's reign, that they at the same time apply to this reign a steadfastness surpassing the continuities of cosmic powers--all this can be explained in exploring the relation of the cosmic times to the complex of historical times. That at the same time, this ruling on a grand scale does not diminish or destroy God's "merciful" concern for the specific historical and individual circumstances, is marked with the metaphors of the loving parent, the shepherd, and others. The rationalities that connect these complex wreaths of metaphors are certainly not only determined by the temporality/eternity framework I just explored. But this framework allows to overcome the almost ubiquitous vagueness in respect to the perichoresis of the three persons or modes of being.

The second wreath of metaphors connects Jesus Christ, his life and his history, to the cosmic dimensions of God's reign, on the one side, and to the salvific situation- and individuum-boundedness of the kairological dimension, on the other. The great christological titles and eschatological visions and the metaphors of the child, friend, brother, lamb offer a pluralism of

interpretations that, in the light of the trinitarian "perichoresis" will prove to be more than a "plurality" of religious opinions. A "canonical" set of metaphors relates the historical dimension to the two other temporal dimensions, thus unfolding not only Christ's earthly and heavenly life but also the trinitarian relations that make this life the revelation of the eternal God.

The third wreath of metaphors relates the being and working of the Holy Spirit to Christ's person and work and to the creativity of the first person or divine mode of being. It will be important to explore why we seem not to have such a rich landscape of metaphors in this respect. Does creaturely reality enter here as a metaphorical space that blurs its own determination to witness? We urgently need a detailed exploration of the sketched "perichoresis of times" as God's eternity becoming present in the finite. We need to explore the grammar and the rationalities of the wreaths of metaphors, their interconnections and their differentiations. In this process of exploration we will more clearly perceive God's creative, forgiving and redeeming activity and, at the same time, we will be able to define more clearly the trinitarian modes of being or persons both in their differences and in their unity. The concentration on God's eternity and God's temporality thus proves itself to be an important key to opening up and developing trinitarian theology. In differentiated ways, it can make us understand how God involves the creatures in God's actions and includes them in the divine liveliness. Over against the mere assurances that the Holy Spirit achieves this or that this happens "in Christ", the activity of the triune God can be described with regard to the perichoresis of times and can in part even be made clear for non-believers. Manifest reasons of sense and experience and biblical orientation can here act together. These are not bad perspectives for faith seeking understanding and for theology's dialogue with the sciences.

Trinitarian theology has, at least so far, been a Christian form of relating to and speaking of God. Trinitarian theology is on the one hand able to develop a rich and differentiated way of speaking of God, on the other hand it seems, as a rule, strange to religiously only weakly informed persons in Christian surroundings, but above all to extra-Christian religious mentalities. Trinitarian theology, so far, has been the reason for the precarius special position that Christian piety and theology have among the monotheistic religions, and for the suspicion of really being a

"tritheistic" religion. We'll need bilateral and subtle experiences of dialogue over quite some period to examine this attitude in self-critical ways and, as far as possible, to do away with it. In this process, the dialogue between the churches and Israel will be of overall importance, the exchange of knowledge about perceptions of differentiations in God common to and different for Israel and the churches. Israel's differentiation between God and God's Spirit as well as between God and God's Chosen One", but above all the meaning and rationality of the different names of God can lead to important questions directed to Christian trinitarian theology, but also to its material support. We'll have to re-examine critically the jesulogical and kyriological christologies and ask whether there are not much stronger material communalities between Israel and the church, e.g., with regard to Israel's concentration on the tora, to the fulfilment of the tora and its messianic mediation. This means that the theologically responsible development of trinitarian theology and its mediation and agreement in the dialogue between the churches and Israel and, beyond this, in the interreligious dialogue is not a matter of exchange of one or two figures of thought or of few actually or supposedly religious experiences of evidence. The doctrine of the living God rather deals with disclosing far-reaching connections of life and knowledge. The following reflections on God's eternity, God's temporality and on trinitarian theology are meant to exemplify them.