

The Nature and Work of the Triune God in Relation to Eternity and Time as the Identity and Mission of the Church

S. Steve Kang

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, USA

This paper seeks to establish the identity and mission of the church in relation to the nature and work of the Triune God by critically examining the nature of time and eternity. Robert Jenson¹ through his major work, the two-volume *Systematic Theology*,² serves as the primary interlocutor throughout this paper. After briefly describing Jenson's theological framework, the discussion ensues by delineating how the contemporary understanding of time and eternity has shaped the church's formulation and maintenance³ of theology proper at a particular period in history. As one example, the paper will examine how the ante-Nicene church sought to articulate the nature of God in the philosophical and sociocultural milieu of the period. The discussion then proceeds to elucidate salient themes concerning the nature and work of the Triune God in relation to eternity and time. It concludes by establishing the indissoluble link between the nature and work of the Triune God and the identity and mission of the church in light of the critical explication of eternity and time.

1. Robert Jenson is a Lutheran Theologian and is currently Senior Scholar for Research at the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton University, and co-editor of *Pro Ecclesia*. While appreciative of Jenson's overall approach, I would not agree with what George Hunsinger calls Jenson's panentheist doctrine of God or a universalistic tendency regarding the doctrine of salvation, which seem tied to his work. See George Hunsinger, "Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: A Review Essay," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002): 161-200.

2. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, Vol. I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*, volume II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Hereafter, *STI* and *STII*, respectively.

3. And its enduring legacy throughout church history to the present.

Robert Jenson's *Theologomena*

Wolfhart Pannenberg, a pre-eminent German theologian, praises Robert Jenson's life-long contribution to the American theological scene and wonders why a theologian of his stature has not been given a place at the center of the American academic establishment.⁴ Indeed, Jenson is one of the most original and knowledgeable theologians of our time. His two-volume *Systematic Theology* is the summary of his theological understanding. Instead of construing the task of theology as deciphering truths from "the ancient biblical text to the contemporary affirmation of doctrine" and labeling the truths as immediate and self-evident,⁵ Jenson approaches theology as second-order discourse. Theology is a hermeneutical reflection⁶ about the first order discourse of faith⁷ that constitutes the church. Seen in this light, it is not unlike George Lindbeck's notion of *grammar* or regulative rules of the church.⁸ The church is the community that communicates in *Christianese*, i.e., the ecumenical creeds and doctrinal statements that are the accepted rules of proper usage where theology functions as the syntax and semantics of this language.⁹ Such a theological task is inherently *historical* in the sense that it is always the reinterpretation of some antecedent understanding¹⁰ and *dialogical* in the instance where "the message of the Resurrection is interpreted by new hearers' existent religion and theology, and their existent religion and theology are interpreted by the message."¹¹

In a vein similar to the post-liberals, Jenson is adamant about conceptualizing the church as its own cultural-linguistic community. For him, it is theology that ultimately provides the church's own account of the final causes at work in the church and also in human history. Jenson

4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Systematic Theology of Robert W. Jenson" in *First Things* 103 (May 2000), 49-53.

5. As construed by many modern day evangelical theologians, observed by Stanley Grenz in Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: W/JKP, 2001), 13.

6. The systematic exploration of the assumed or presupposed categories of thought that delimit the boundary of thinking, predetermine the thought, and guide the practical carrying out of social or psychological inquiry. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

7. The first order discourse of faith basically refers to what *happens* in the church, i.e., proclamation, sacraments, prayer, confession, praise.

8. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: W/JKP, 1984), 79-84.

9. Jenson, *STI*, 18.

10. Jenson, *STI*, 54.

11. Jenson, *STI*, 54.

argues that borrowings from secular theories must be on an *ad hoc* basis, and that borrowings must be done with a great sense of reflexivity and circumspection.¹² His uneasiness with borrowing secular or “recruited” concepts without considerable interrogation in light of *Christianese* is especially significant in regard to the contemporary understanding of how the concept of time and eternity has shaped the formulation of theology proper in the early church.

**The Relationship between the Contemporary
Understandings of Time and Eternity
and the Church’s Formulation of Theology Proper:
A Case Study in the Ante-Nicene Church**

What was God doing before he made heaven and earth? . . . He was preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries.¹³

Such a frivolous retort hints not only at the mystery of God’s existence before the creation of the universe, but also at the elusive nature of time and eternity in relation to God’s being. From Augustine of Hippo to Oscar Cullman,¹⁴ the church has sought to understand how all creation is held together in time and space through the eternal Son of God.¹⁵ More recently, there has been a resurgent interest among Christian scholars in North America and Europe in conceptualizing the notion of time and eternity in the area of apologetics and in the dialog between science and religion.¹⁶ The major thrust of these scholars has been to establish a Christian philosophical framework of time and eternity in the area of cosmology. The hope is to legitimize a distinctly Christian understanding of the universe in academia.

Although more modest in scope, several theologians in recent years have engaged in a renewed theological reflection on the Triune God by discussing the eternal and temporal significance of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Among these theologians, Robert Jenson

12. Jenson, *STI*, 172.

13. Augustine, *Confessions* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 262.

14. Anicius Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Martin Heidegger, among others are those who wrote on the issues of time, eternity, and being in the West. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and Eternity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

15. Col 1:16-17.

16. Wolfgang Achtner, Stefan Kunz and Thomas Walter, *Dimensions of Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001); Gregory Ganssle, *God and Time* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

17. Colin Gunton, “Time, Eternity and the Doctrine of the Incarnation,”

has made a significant contribution by articulating the nature and work of the Triune God and, thus, reformulating the identity and mission of the church.

Jenson is quick to point out how Greeks identified deity by metaphysical predicates. Central to their construal was *timelessness*. Human beings have their being construed in time while a god and other anti-anthropomorphic entities are not bound in time. The Greeks projected to deity immunity to temporal contingencies, particularly death, and hoped that death and temporal contingencies would be swallowed up in deity.¹⁸ It was the projection of its adherents, in which the ultimate life's quest was fulfilled. For the Greeks, the Olympian gods were precisely "the immortals," and that fact alone was enough for them in their construal of deity. Moreover, timeless deity was conceived to have ordered "time's otherwise meaninglessly fleeting sequence."¹⁹ In the process, the relation between eternity and time could be grasped only by mere negation, and the difference viewed as simple discontinuity between the two kinds of reality. To rectify the different and antithetical relations between eternity and time, late antiquity had to rely on the last resort. They summoned *relatively* temporal entities or demi-gods to bridge the two realms.

It was in this sociohistorical milieu that, between the middle of the second century and the end of the fifth century, Christianity found itself engaged in the gospel discourse. For example, Justin Martyr was a pagan convert, who then became the most notable apologist of the second-century. He argued that Christianity was a true philosophy, whereas other philosophies were shadows or generative seeds of the truth fulfilled in Jesus Christ.²⁰ Perhaps influenced by the notion of pagan deity, Justin construed immutability as the most salient quality of God, coupled with impassibility.²¹ In any event, Justin could not reconcile the fact that God was also a compassionate, patient, and immanent God who had concerns for the plight of human beings in temporal situations. With such

Dialog: A Journal of Theology 21 (1982): 263-268; Tibor Horvath, "Jesus Christ, The Eschatological Union of Time and Eternity," in *Science et Esprit* XL/2 (1988): 179-192; Michael Welker, "God's Eternity, God's Temporality and Trinitarian Theology," *Theology Today* 55 (1998): 317-328.

18. Jenson's assessment of Greeks' construal of deity is similar to Feuerbach's critical assessment of Christianity where the divine being is the product of projected human aspirations and longings. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Amhurst: Prometheus, 1841/1989).

19. Jenson, *STI*, 94.

20. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 915.

21. Immunity to suffering and temporal contingency in general.

initial assumptions, Justin proceeded to interpret the divinity of the Son and the Spirit who accomplished a double mediation, similar to other late-antiquity's saviors, helping human beings gain temporal access to a timeless deity. According to Jenson, what kept the apologists "religiously Trinitarian was not their theology *but their church's liturgical life*."²²

Such a teaching inevitably led to subordinationism²³ in the early church. It is not too extreme to assert that other Christological heresies²⁴ ensued as results of regretful attempts to reconcile the apparent difference and antithetical relations between the impassible God the Father and a compassionate God the Son. Gregory of Nyssa, a Cappadocian Father and an ardent defender of the Nicene dogma of the Trinity, successfully argued that the Arians uncritically internalized the paradigmatic beliefs of the Greeks and thus refused to refer to the *Logos* as God because of its deeds of love and suffering for humanity.²⁵ The Arian God's immunity to time renders God inactive, whereas the "being of Gregory's God is that he keeps things moving."²⁶

The Nature of the Triune God in Relation to Eternity and Time

Persuaded by Gregory's understanding of God and influenced by Karl Barth's theologoumena,²⁷ Jenson signals a departure from traditional systematic theological treatises of the nature of God by omitting those attributes that have served as predicates denoting God's character,²⁸ especially God's incommunicable attributes. Instead, Jenson begins with four predicates that are generatively descriptive in that they function as reservoirs in which biblical narratives of God's works may be accumulated and witnessed. In this move, Jenson positions himself to

22. Jenson, *STI*, 95.

23. Even Ebionism, although commonly known as a Jewish sect that is said to have used the "Gospel according to the Hebrews," some scholars believe that, citing Ephiphanius, the Ebionite ("poor men" in Hebrew) Gospel was actually the Gospel according to Matthew that was written in Greek and, while Jewish in its origin, Ebionites are said to have embraced some syncretistic practices of the time. See David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:260-262.

24. Modalism, Docetism, and Apollinarianism.

25. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2901.htm> (accessed January 12, 2009).

26. *STI*, 216.

27. First Principles or origins of a way of speaking of God or theology ("God-talk"). Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology of Robert Jenson*, 50.

28. Such attributes as God's independence, immutability, impassibility, omnipresence, etc.

freely explore the nature and works of God, perhaps more responsibly, according to Scripture. Particularly, Jenson can address the vexing issues of the Triune God in relation to eternity and time. God, in Jenson's system, is an event, a person, a decision and a conversation.

First, God is an *event*. It is a particular event, *perichoresis*, namely, the active relations of the Triune persons. Thus, the fundamental statement about God's being is that, "God is what happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit . . . God might have been the God he is without this world to happen to."²⁹ Observing Karl Rahner's rule,³⁰ Jenson, at this point, boldly conjectures that the *immanent* Triune event is revealed to human beings through the *economic* Triune event, where the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God the Son, occurred among and for God's elect and the world.³¹

Second, the one God is a *person*. As the Triune God, he is truly faithful to himself, in that "all his acts cohere to make the one act that he personally is."³² He is also faithful to human beings with his commitments within time.³³

Third, the one God is a *decision* in that the decision is "the logical product of 'God is an event' and 'God is a person.'"³⁴ The Triune God freely decides, as a person, which events he will be part of, for he is the event itself. God, accordingly, *is* the act of his decision.

Fourth, the one God is a *conversation*. The Logos "is at once *with* and *is* God: the Word is both spoken by and to God, and is the God who speaks and hears."³⁵ The Son is also God's Word to us, and the Spirit proceeds also from the Word. In this sense, Christian eternity is not silence but discourse.

29. Jenson, *STI*, 221.

30. That the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are one. "The reason is that the incarnation as well as the salvation of human kind and the final, eschatological consummation of the world belong to the divine economy. Therefore, if the incarnation belongs to the immanent Trinitarian life of God, then the immanent Trinitarian life and the divine economy must be one." Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39 (2000): 12.

31. Jenson, *STI*, 221.

32. Jenson, *STI*, 222. It is also interesting to note, in the midst of the Openness of God debates among American Evangelicals in recent years, what Jenson says about God as a person: "God is not God in spite of changing his mind, in spite of answering prayer or failing to do so; he is God because he does and can do such things wholeheartedly."

33. Jenson, *STI*, 217.

34. Jenson, *STI*, 223.

35. Jenson, *STI*, 223.

Based on the *generatively* descriptive predicates of the Triune God, the notions of eternity and time can now be properly conceptualized as Trinitarian concepts. *The Triune God's eternity is nothing less than the infinity of the life that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit share with one another.* 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.”³⁶ Following Barth’s lead, Jenson asserts that the particular eternity of the Triune God is “pure duration,” in that it is unbroken; nothing can escape God by withdrawing or disappearing into the past, and nothing can surprise God from the future. Within the immanent Trinity, the beginning, succession, and end of that duration do not fall apart, for they *are* that pure duration. Within the economic Trinity, in God’s gracious and intentional dealings with human beings, consequently, it is unmistakable to observe that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.³⁷ Moreover, the source, movement, and goal of the pure duration are characterized by *shalom*. And in this sense, the pure duration, i.e., the eternity, of the immanent Trinity, engulfs time through the ultimate enactment of *shalom* in Jesus Christ in time and space.³⁸

However, the experience of pure duration within the Triune God is fundamentally in opposition with human beings’ inability to live in God’s duration. As Augustine laments, in each moment of time, for human beings, the past is already non-existent, and the future is beyond reach. The present, if one pauses to reflect upon it, is already past. Human beings can only extend into the past and the future and, thus, achieve a sort of enduring presence by the power of their attention,³⁹ as if carrying a melody (the Psalm, in Augustine’s case). Augustine referred to time a distending of the soul, *distention animi*, through which human beings can vaguely begin to intuit the divine eternity.⁴⁰

Unlike various descriptions of eternity as some sort of transcendence removed from temporal limits, the Triune God’s eternity is never the simple contradiction of time or the simple absence of time. God’s transcendence is not a flight or indifference toward beginnings and goals in some sort of deistic sense. Rather, he transcends “any limit imposed on what he can be by what has been, except the limit of his personal self-identity, and any limit imposed on his action by the availability of time.”⁴¹

36. Jenson, *STI*, 219-220.

37. Rom 8:38-39.

38. Jenson, *STI*, 217.

39. Past, through memory and future, through anticipation.

40. Augustine, *Confessions*, 271, 274-277

41. Jenson, *STI*, 217.

A corollary to the eternity of the Triune God as pure duration is his “temporal eternity.” When the Psalmist writes, “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by,”⁴² he does not mean that time passes away from the presence of God. Instead, he is declaring that God looks at the whole of time in a way that human beings do when a period is complete. In other words, when God glances over a time period, it is like when humans, at the opening of a new day, glance over the yesterday that has gone. A thousand years, for instance, do not affect him.⁴³ Whether at the beginning or at the close of the thousand years, God is the Absolute One, in the sense that his continuous identity remains undisturbed by the process of time.⁴⁴ God, indeed, is *temporally* infinite in that:

“Source” and “goal” are present *and* asymmetrical in him, because he is primarily future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself. . . . God is not eternal in that he adamantly remains as he began but in that he always creatively opens to what he will be; not in that he hangs on, but in that he gives and receives; not in that he perfectly persists, but in that he perfectly anticipates.⁴⁵

The notion of asymmetry that Jenson is referring to is consonant with the modern exegesis of Exodus 3:14, where exegetical preference is increasingly given to God’s saying “I shall be who I shall be” over the traditional rendering of God “I am who I am.”⁴⁶ There is a definite sense of the future in the Triune God in that he continually discloses himself to be what he will be, as he unceasingly generates future from his infinite Triune self. In the context of God’s temporal eternity, a predication of God as love in an anthropomorphic manner seems static and incomplete. Instead, if the Triune God is temporally infinite in its members’ *perichoresis*, God’s eternity must be construed as love in continual action, precisely because his eternity is intensely personal, decisive in his freedom, and conversational in his creativity.

42. Ps 90:2.

43. Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms III: Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1867/1988), 52.

44. Isa 41:4 – “Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.” Also in Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 10.

45. Jenson, *STI*, 217.

46. William Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 204. Davies in his commentary of the verse renders God as “I AM *who and what, and where and when, and how and even why you will discover* I AM.” G. H. Davies, *Exodus: Torch Bible Commentaries* (London: SCM, 1967), 72.

Thus, construing the Triune God as temporally infinite, the infinity of the life that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit share with one another, constitutes, perhaps, the most theologically plausible move in understanding the reality of eternity. Such a move obviously privileges the social dimension of the immanent Trinity as the source and goal of the life of the Triune God. From this perspective, time is a *distention in God's life* and should be described as “the room” God makes in his eternity for others besides himself.⁴⁷ Yet this is a radical departure from the modern conception about time.

In fact, following Jenson, I conclude that time should be viewed decidedly as the metaphysical horizon of specifically human life. All human self-understanding and action are inevitably tensed in that every human act occurs as—and as the juncture of—memory (past) and anticipation (future).⁴⁸ Human life, thus, can be construed only when past and future are in some fashion bracketed by a reality that reconciles them in present existence. In this sense, a person's life “posits an *embrace* around created time, to clasp its doings and sufferings in dramatic coherence.”⁴⁹ By contrast, according to Adrian Hastings, the modern view of time arose from a fourteenth century monastic desire to order the prayer time of day and night. Their efforts to standardize their rule of life led to the development and promotion of mechanical clocks. Ultimately, by 1972, human civilizations attained the absolute speed of simultaneity when Co-ordinated Universal Time was introduced utilizing the implacable oscillations of atomic cesium. Human beings have been successful in commodifying temporality that can be “bought and sold, lost and wasted, but never purely enjoyed.”⁵⁰ In everyday life, today's people of tend to regard time as simply what happens in space—the horizon of what is all there for us at once, that is, the ever-fleeting present.⁵¹ Against such social reductionism, Jenson argues that time must be understood as that room in which the immanent Trinity graciously affords human beings an opportunity to come into an authentic relationship with the eternal Triune God. From the creation of the world, the Triune God has indeed taken—and continues to take—time, which is in itself created, for human beings to respond to his invitation to such an *eternal* relationship. This relationship has become possible through the decisive act of the economic Trinity.

47. Jenson, *STI*, 46.

48. Jenson, *STI*, 55.

49. Jenson, *STI*, 55.

50. Adrian Hastings, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 708.

51. Jenson, *STI*, 46.

The Action of the Triune God in Relation to Eternity and Time

When the fullness of time had come,⁵² the Triune God decisively revealed himself in Jesus Christ. The Son has become for us, in a particular time and space, the “*content* of the proclamation whose *power* is the Spirit and whose *source* is the Father.”⁵³ In other words, in God’s providential time,⁵⁴ Jesus Christ executes God the Father’s gracious attitude and action toward human beings by the power of the Holy Spirit through his birth, life, death, and resurrection in time and space. As a result, he *fully* constitutes the identity of eternal future, and has *fully* secured the eschatological possibility for human beings.⁵⁵

Just how has the identity of eternal future for human beings been fully constituted in Jesus Christ? Within the infinity of the divine life, the immanent Trinity decided that Christ’s birth from God the Father would be the divine *future* of his birth from the seed of David in history.⁵⁶ In that divine *perichoresis*, the Father has begotten the Son⁵⁷ and breathed the Holy Spirit into him.⁵⁸ Seen in this manner, Christ, the Son of Man, is a human person originated from the seed of David. As the Son of God, he does not have an origin except by a determination in the immanent Trinity, whom John calls “the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.”⁵⁹ However, the absolute purpose of what Jesus Christ had been predetermined to do was not fully accomplished until his resurrection. According to Paul, Christ’s Sonship is fully declared in that he is resurrected from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰

52. Gal 4:4.

53. Jenson, *STI*, 171.

54. John Calvin, *Commentary of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1548/2003), 118.

55. The identity of human beings’ eternal future was *fully* constituted in time and space, which was already predestined in the Triune God’s election of Jesus Christ, God the Son in whom God’s people were chosen before the foundation of the world. See Eph 1:4.

56. Jenson, *STI*, 143. Rom 1:3.

57. “Begotten, not made.” From the Nicene Creed.

58. Luke 3:22. “The freedom *in* and *into* which the Son is begotten of the Father is the Spirit. That is, the *antecedence* of the deity *in* and *into* which the Son is begotten in the Spirit.” Jenson, *STI*, 143.

59. 1 John 1:1-2.

60. Rom 1:3-4; Phil 2:5-11.

Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is not merely an obvious consequence of his deity; instead, it is the Triune God's amazing triumph of time.⁶¹ God the Father triumphs over suffering when the Son suffered

all the contingencies and evils in the Gospels, and concludes them by suffering execution. . . . God the Spirit is the sphere of the triumph. And 'triumph' is the precise word: the Father and the Spirit take the suffering of the creature who the Son is into the Triune life and bring from it the final good of that creature, all other creatures, and of God. . . . So and not otherwise the true God transcends suffering – whatever unknowably might have been.⁶²

Consequently, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, endured physical suffering on the cross by himself, willingly becoming sin.⁶³ Even as he did so, he was still with the Father and the Spirit in the economic Trinity. Commenting on Jesus' loud cry, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" John Chrysostom observes, "That they might see that to his last breath he honors God as his Father. . . . He spoke with the voice of Scripture, uttering a cry from the psalm. Accordingly, even to his last hour he is found bearing witness to the sacred text. . . . By all things Jesus shows how he is of one mind with the Father who had begotten him."⁶⁴

Moreover, although no coherent response to such questions is tenable to questions such as "Was God a binity between Good Friday and Easter?" or "Is the incarnation subject to temporary suspension?", Jenson asserts that "Jesus' abandonment and death do not interrupt the relation to the Father by which he is the Son but, rather, belong to that relation."⁶⁵ Seen in this manner, these manifestly temporal events belong to the pure duration and temporal eternity of the divine *perichoresis*. In other words, Jesus Christ, the absolute Lord, who is not subjected to created time's contingencies, not only participates in but also swallows up and, hence, transcends time's contingencies.⁶⁶

Just as the *temporal* events of Jesus' suffering and resurrection became a part in the *temporal eternity* of the Triune God, so also the consequences of the temporal events are fully realized in the tempo-

61. Jenson, *STI*, 48.

62. Jenson, *STI*, 144.

63. 2 Cor 5:21 – "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."

64. John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 88.I. NPNF (A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd Series) 1 10:521 in Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28*, ACCS (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 294-295.

65. Jenson, *STI*, 49.

66. Jenson, *STI*, 144.

ral eternity. Perhaps the most temporally significant consequence of the divine events is that God the Father made Jesus Christ the firstfruits and the heir⁶⁷ of the eschaton. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, Paul refers to Jesus Christ as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Commenting on these verses, John Calvin, among others, applies the eternal consequence of the firstfruits not only to those who died before Christ but also to the elect who also lived during Paul's time, and, as a result, to all the elect from eternity past and present.⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Paul reminds the Christians in Galatia that since they have become children of God, they are also co-heirs with Jesus Christ, the heir through whom they were declared as such.⁶⁹ Peter Brunner⁷⁰ testifies affirmatively to the future of the elect when he says, "From eternity the Father sees us in the Son. . . . as determined for fellowship with him . . . In that God in the totality of his being . . . thus enters the covenant of relation he has willed, saving history as real history is possible for God."⁷¹

Similarly, the doctrine of election in Jesus Christ, for both Barth and Jenson, takes center stage in the doctrine of God's being. They contend that God chooses to unite himself with humankind in Jesus Christ before all time. For it is God's

free grace that in Him He elects to be man and to have dealings with man [*sic*] and to join Himself to man. He, Jesus Christ, is the free grace of God as not content simply to remain identical with the inward and eternal being of God, but operating *ad extra* in the ways and works of God. And for this reason, before Him and above Him and beside Him and apart from Him there is no election, no beginning, no decree, no Word of God.⁷²

The Triune God chose to reveal himself as God only as the one person, Jesus Christ, not merely that he *will be* the man Jesus, as similarly construed by Apollinarians or Docetists, but that, as the event of choice,

67. Heb 1:2.

68. John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1546/2003), 2:24-25. Robertson and Plummer assert that "First-fruit' implies community of nature. The first sheaf offered in the Temple on the morrow of the Passover was the same in kind as the rest of the harvest, and was a sort of consecration of the whole. . . . Christ is the first installment, an earnest that many more are to follow." Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911/1986), 351-352.

69. Gal 4:7.

70. Not to be confused with Emil Brunner.

71. Peter Brunner, *Pro Ecclesia* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1962), 1:110, as quoted in Jenson, *STI*, 221.

72. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II:2 (The Doctrine of God) (Edinburgh:

he *is* the man Jesus. The concept of election has a double reference in that Jesus is both the elector and the elected.⁷³ Within the immanent Trinity, God the Son, in the *perichoresis* with the Father and the Spirit, decisively determined that he is to be the elect. Because Jesus became a human being, the “passive determination of election is also and necessarily proper to Him.”⁷⁴

In this sense, the Incarnate Son is himself

his own presupposition in God’s eternity: the Incarnation happens in eternity as the foundation of its happening in time, in eternity as the act of decision that God is, and in time as the carrying-out of what God decides. . . . “Before” the existence of the Incarnate there is the eternal Triune life, *in* the actuality of which it is decided that there be a created history and a life of the Son in that history.⁷⁵

As discussed above, if God is merely construed in terms of his eternal, timeless character, God’s election in Christ or predestination inevitably becomes a lifeless and timeless rule for temporal life. In contrast, Jesus Christ has always been *and* was declared as the living and eternal Lord of temporal life through his resurrection. Because of his loving obedience in the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus attains freedom through the power of the Holy Spirit, choosing the God who has already elected him.⁷⁶ In time, these Christ events took place in history – the unfolding of the distension in God’s life for human beings. Yet, Christ’s work must not be limited only as a static cause producing certain effects for human beings in history. Christ events have always been part of the temporal eternity in the Triune God, precisely because the Triune God’s election of Jesus Christ and his people mysteriously comprised the entirety of Christ’s work⁷⁷ that is to take place in time – the distension in God’s life for human beings.

The concept of the election of Jesus has a double reference to both the elector and the elected; this leads to another crucial aspect of the election of Jesus Christ in temporal eternity, namely, the *double* predestination *of* and *in* Jesus Christ. Here, the “double election” or “double predestination” does not primarily address the eternal destinies of the elect and the reprobate. Double predestination refers to God’s “self-election” of Jesus as the Christ and God’s election of His people.⁷⁸ Moreover,

T&T Clark, 1957), 94-95, 103.

73. This concept will be discussed shortly.

74. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II:2, 103.

75. Jenson, *STI*, 140.

76. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II:2, 188.

77. Including the *effects* of Christ’s work.

78. John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000), 91.

double predestination includes both election and reprobation in that Jesus, the elect, had to become self-reprobate and rejected,⁷⁹ which was the result of human beings' rejection of God. In other words, God in Christ takes our rejection of God on himself. In this move, there can no longer be our rejection that thwarts God's choosing of the elect – for Jesus Christ takes on the rejection on himself. It is Christ who became the sin for us, so that God's elect can fully declare that, "Christ is the accepted rejected one, and we who would have been rejected will be accepted in him."⁸⁰

What is significant about the "pre-" in "predestination," in Jenson's understanding of election, is determined by the same "pre-" as in "preexistence of Christ" in the temporal eternity of God.⁸¹ These "pre's" signal God's priority or futurity to all being that is determined by his anteriority, namely, the divine entity prior to the created personality of the Gospels.⁸² What, then, is the purpose of the death and resurrection of Christ within created time when the elect were already predestined before time?

Here, also, the theology of predestination must answer the critics who say that, in the theology of predestination, human beings have no freedom to make decisions for or against faith in what Jesus Christ has done on the cross. The most plausible response should begin by "locating" Jesus' death and resurrection in history, namely, in a particular time and space *in the temporal eternity of God*. In that temporal eternity, his death and resurrection in time are somehow inexplicably (i.e., though not necessarily sequentially) connected with the preexistence of Christ and the Triune God's election of Jesus Christ because God is not bound by the sequentiality of Christ's events that human beings can only construe chronologically. In it, also, the election of Jesus Christ has determined the predestination of the elect where human beings may have some significant role in accepting in faith, through the gracious witness of the Holy Spirit, what Jesus has done on the cross in time and space.

Human freedom, therefore, should be construed as a responsive act of faith to receive what Jesus Christ has done in history, but also to the Triune God's gracious double predestination of the elect to be reinstated *forever* in the temporal eternity of God. Such a construction, while preserving human beings' temporal responsibility to respond to Christ's salvific work in the history, preserves the Triune God's double predesti-

79. In order to decisively realize the full effect of the election of God's elect from their reprobation.

80. Jenson, *STII*, 176-177.

81. Jenson, *STII*, 177.

82. Jenson, *STII*, 139.

tionation in the temporal eternity of God.⁸³ In other words, as Jenson posits, “It is not that God has *already* decided whether I am or am not of his community. He *will* decide and *so* has decided; and *has decided* and *so will* decide; and *so decides* also within created time.”⁸⁴

In principle, both Barth and Jenson, at this point, have affirmatively followed the teachings of predestination by Augustine, Calvin, Luther and others. Nevertheless, Jenson is quick to point out that standard developments of the doctrine of election have been inclined to treat the election of Jesus the Christ as one thing and the election of his people into the church and the Kingdom as another,⁸⁵ despite significant teachings about the election of God’s people in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.⁸⁶ Jenson continues:

Much theology has made it possible to think of the God who predestines us in abstraction from Christ and so in nontrinitarian fashion; and then of the chosen or reprobated humans as correspondingly monadic individuals. The picture of God in solitary eternity arbitrarily sorting future persons into two heaps is rejected by all serious teachers of predestination but is nevertheless irresistibly suggested by much of their teaching.⁸⁷

Here, Jenson is criticizing the modern Western Protestant church for its individualizing and privatizing tendency towards the profundity of salvation, which has severely diminished the enormity of Jesus’ eternal work of election and its immense consequences for God’s elect. Jenson protests, “We are not permitted to leap directly from the election of Christ to the question of individuals’ election to salvation.”⁸⁸ Especially, Jenson is bemoaning the disappearance of the proper understanding of the relationship between the election of Jesus Christ and the election of

83. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: W/JKP, 1960).

84. Jenson, *STII*, 177.

85. Jenson, *STII*, 175.

86. 1 Pet 1:20-21, “*He was chosen before the creation of the world* (italics mine), but was revealed in these last times for your sake. *Through him you believe in God* (italics mine), who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”; Rom 8:29-30, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be *the firstborn within a large family* (italics mine). And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.”; Eph 1:4-6, “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world* (italics mine) to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

87. Jenson, *STII*, 175.

88. Jenson, *STII*, 177.

the one community of God. The election of the one community of God is to attest Jesus Christ to the whole world and to summon the whole world to faith in Jesus Christ.⁸⁹

At a practical level, the modern Protestant church's dismal view of election is not unlike the teachings of salvation by revivalism in the early United States. Revivalism challenged individuals to take hold of the faith immediately and take the step of faith for themselves. The revivalists were, by and large, anti-traditional and ahistorical—they taught “what had gone on in the churches through the centuries was irrelevant to what must be done with respect to the faith *now*.”⁹⁰ Mark Noll observes that “the form of revivalism that eventually came to prevail as the dominant mode of evangelical church life was activist, immediatistic, and individualistic. . . . But also as such—with its scorn for tradition, its concentration on individual competence, its distrust of mediated knowledge—American revivalism did much to hamstring the life of the mind.”⁹¹ In this manner, the modern evangelical church has failed to fully grasp the identity and mission of the church as fundamentally rooted in the double election of and in Jesus Christ, while engulfed in endless debates over merely *time-bounded*, inadequate understanding of eschatology and in continual, aimless accommodation in understanding and being the church in light of the constant sociocultural shifts.

The Nature and Work of the Triune God for the Church in Relation to Eternity and Time

As discussed above, one unfortunate result of the scandal of the Christian mind is that the American Protestant church has largely failed to understand the essential, constitutive nature of the election of Jesus Christ and his people as one, which was determined in God's temporal eternity and realized in time in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the doctrine of election (among other doctrines) has not disappeared or been lost, in the sense that somehow the doctrine has been abducted from the church. The disappearance is in the sense that, while it remains in the church, for all intents and purposes, it has no place in the church.⁹²

89. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II:2, 195.

90. Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 63.

91. Noll, *Scandal*, 63-64.

92. David Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 106-109.

Commenting on the individualized understanding of election and its devastating consequences, Jenson asserts, in the tradition of Augustine and Barth:

To overcome it, we must lay it [the doctrine of election] down from the start: the one sole object of eternal election is Jesus with his people, the *totus Christus*. Augustine taught, with his elegant precision: "Just as this One is predestined, to be our head, so we many are predestined, to be his members." That it is the man Jesus who is the Son is an event of decision in God; and that the church, with the very individuals who belong to the church, is the body of this person is the *same* event of decision.⁹³

Accordingly, the remarkable privilege of the eternal election for the elect in Christ, in Jenson's theology, is nothing less than being participants in time⁹⁴ and in God's temporal eternity, "in the one God-man, members of the *totus Christus*; they are God-bearers communally and not otherwise."⁹⁵ Following Luther's pronouncement, "By faith the human person becomes God,"⁹⁶ Jenson asserts that justification is "a mode of deification."⁹⁷ He maintains that Luther was forthright in going beyond even his radical younger disciples by making the claim that God's elect are united with Christ in "a real communion of divine attributes," when Luther said, "Every Christian fills heaven and earth in his faith."⁹⁸ Although, this communion is definitely

93. Jenson, *STII*, 175.

94. Which is a part of God's temporal eternity.

95. Jenson, *STII*, 341.

96. Martin Luther, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas*, 182, quoted in Jenson, *STII*, 296-297.

97. See Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) for an excellent rendering of the recent Finnish interpretation of Luther's understanding of the mystery of salvation. Tuomo Mannermaa of Helsinki University argues that Luther believed that Jesus Christ is really present in faith itself, arguing that Luther's view of justification is more expansive than merely ethical and juridical, as in the traditional *forensic* understanding of justification. Instead, Luther's view of justification is more ontological and mystical than the modern Reformation interpreters of Luther's teaching. Calvin also teaches the mystical notion of union with Christ. See Dennis Tamburello's *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: W/JKP, 1994), which traces the mystical strand of thought that is salient in the writings of Calvin. However, I am also aware of some of the methodological and ontological critiques on the new Finnish interpretation, which are generally appreciative of the breakthrough in Luther research. See Dennis Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 401-420.

98. Luther, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas*, 392, quoted in Jenson, *STII*,

not dissolution in God or even any usual sort of mysticism or idealism, for the Christ who is one with me so that I am one with God is precisely Christ in “flesh and bones.” [quoting Luther here] “The ‘righteousness of God’ [in Romans] . . . is the righteousness by which God is righteous, so that God and we are righteous by the same righteousness, just as by the same word God makes us and we indeed are what he is, so that we may be in him and his being may be our being.”⁹⁹

In God’s temporal eternity, God’s elect have begun to be part of the Triune community by having accepted the work of Jesus in time and by virtue of union with Christ. The union with Christ is through the Spirit alone, according to Calvin, in that by the “sacred wedlock,” the elect are made “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, and thus one with him.”¹⁰⁰ It is by the grace and power of the same Spirit that the elect are made his members “to keep us under himself and in turn to *possess* him.”¹⁰¹ As Luther put it, “For what greater fame and pride could we have . . . than to be called the children of the Highest and to *have all he is and has?*”¹⁰² Upon Christ’s return to earth, this world will pass away and time, God’s distention for human beings, will be fully subsumed in God’s temporal eternity. In that realm, Jenson also contends that God’s elect will be simultaneously *with* God in sanctity and righteousness and *personally identified* with God. In this sense, the gift of “eternal” life for the elect is *not* merely an infinite duration of time but is none other than *God and the gift of all he is*. Moreover, God’s self-glorification is the “supreme blessing because the *Triune* God can and does include creatures in that glory.”¹⁰³ This certainly is the life of the deified elect in the presence of the Triune God, which holds for the elect *in full force* upon the consummation of this world, preceded by Christ’s second coming.

In the meantime, God’s elect are called to begin to enjoy such participation in Christ and in God’s righteousness, which is already and not-yet. So long as this age endures, the elect, as the church, are to take up the cross and follow Jesus.¹⁰⁴ With this in mind, the elect are not called to resort hopelessly to self-discipline and self-resolve or to view increased accomplishments as progress in discipleship.¹⁰⁵ Instead, they

297.

99. Jenson, *STII*, 297.

100. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 541.

101. Calvin, *Institutes*, 541.

102. Jenson, *STII*, 311.

103. Jenson, *STII*, 311.

104. Luke 9:23 “Then he said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

105. While I am sympathetic to the religio-historical context in which

are to follow Jesus by *returning* to the baptism¹⁰⁶ in Christ – by “ever new hearing of the promise,” as Luther emphasized when he instructed the believers: “The Christian has enough in baptism for his life’s study and practice.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Luther understood the enormous significance of Christ events for the *community* of the elect in the temporal eternity of God in this temporal world. Baptism ushers the believers into the community of God’s elect in time and space that has already been established in the temporal eternity of God, which in time is also referred to as the reign of God or God’s eternal kingdom. Through baptism, then, God’s elect are called by God’s grace to be the community in time and space, where the foundation is none other than God’s historical revelation in Jesus Christ and its enduring effect that constitutes the identity of the church through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Such a communion of saints exhorts God’s elect to enter into and dwell in God’s temporal eternity, resocializing itself as the earthly manifestation of God’s eternal kingdom. This resocialization of the community involves the on-going process of cultivating Christocentric virtues and practices that are informed by the biblical narrative, which functions as the grand narrative of God’s eternal kingdom.

In the Triune God’s economy, God the Father mandates or predestines the church.¹⁰⁸ It is an eschatological *detour*¹⁰⁹ of Christ’s second

Luther’s and subsequently Lutheran aversion to works-righteousness arose, I espouse the grace-filled, Christ-centered practice of spiritual disciplines (both individual *and* corporate) as a crucial means of entering, lingering, and dwelling in God’s temporal eternity. As discussed in footnote 6, I take spiritual disciplines as a means of formation through which the elect invoke the Holy Spirit to continue transforming their lives as an individual and community.

106. By baptism, I subscribe to Calvin’s view where baptism, while it both *effects* and *represents* the believer’s union with Christ in which she participates in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:4 – “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”), is cleansed from her sins (1 Cor. 6:11 – “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”), incorporated into the Body of Christ and “made to drink of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13 – “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”), and is efficacious only for the elect. Without faith the rite is worthless. I also hold Luther’s notion that baptism is a promise of divine grace after which an elected person’s sins are no longer imputed to him or her. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 150-151.

107. Jenson, *STII*, 297.

108. Jenson, *STII*, 173.

109. Jenson, *STII*, 171.

coming and the Kingdom future. Pentecost signals the Holy Spirit's "particular personal initiative to delay the Parousia."¹¹⁰ At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends to the elect eschatologically, yet without ending this age, and establishes the church. It must be underscored that both Christ and the Spirit *mutually* established the church, and the charismatic reality of the church must have its proper congruence with the work of Jesus Christ for the church. Had the Holy Spirit not descended on Pentecost and had Jesus risen into the eschatological future, leaving behind his elect, Jesus would have been a mere memory to the elect, captured at a certain time in the past. In other words, Jesus would not have been able to be within the church in a "present-tense actuality."¹¹¹

However, it is the Holy Spirit who unites the head of the church, Jesus Christ, with the Body of Christ. So, since Jesus Christ "is never present except by the Spirit," the church's identity and ministry are by its nature charismatic. Such a vision of the "sacramentality of the ministry roots in the fact that Christ is at once the one whom the Spirit makes present for the community and the one who gives the Spirit to the community."¹¹² Through this gracious act of God the Spirit, the community of God's elect receives and communes with Jesus Christ and becomes his embodiment within the present time of this age. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended and poured himself out to commission a prophetic community for the world, not individual prophets, by vivifying and freeing precisely those who are *in* Jesus Christ.¹¹³

The church, the community of God's elect, is not the Kingdom of God as if it were a full realization of the new age.¹¹⁴ Instead, the church is precisely a temporal event or the "anticipated eschatology" within the temporal eternity of God. It exists in and by *anticipation* of Christ's

110. Jenson, *STII*, 180.

111. Jenson, *STII*, 181.

112. Jenson, *STII*, 182.

113. See the following: Acts 2:17 – "In the last days it will be, God declares, that 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.'"; Rom 8:1-11; 1 Cor 12:7 – "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."; 2 Cor 3:17 – "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Jenson, *STII*, 181.

114. The church is not the same as the Kingdom of God in that the former denotes "people" whereas the latter "rule" or "reign." However, they do not oppose each other. The latter subsumes the former where "the messianic reign is calling out the messianic people. The Kingdom has been inaugurated; the people are being gathered. So far as the Kingdom has been inaugurated in advance of its consummation, so far also is Jesus' church an outpost in history of the final eschatological community." Don A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 8, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 369-370.

return on earth, which will once and for all terminate time, which is God's distention for his elect. In the meantime, the Kingdom does not merely remain as future. When and where "God's rule is established, the Kingdom occurs. . . . And when the risen Christ in the audible and visible words of the church enforces the rule of God, the Kingdom occurs."¹¹⁵

Conclusion: The Task of the Church in Relation to Eternity and Time

In light of the temporal eternity of God and God's elect, the New Testament describes the church as the people of God, the temple of the Spirit, and the body of Christ. First, the notion of the people of God defines the church's boundaries more flexibly. It tends to obscure the distinction between clergy and laity and focuses on God the Father's gracious attitude toward his elect.¹¹⁶ Surprisingly, in many occurrences, the designation refers to the nation of Israel in view of the New Testament. In other occurrences, the people of God refers to the church, in its identification with Israel, and carry an overwhelmingly eschatological meaning.¹¹⁷ Consequently, the designation emphasizes that every member belongs to the church through the call of God's election of his people in his temporal eternity. In other words, the church must not be construed as an exclusive or private organization that is founded by like-minded religious people.¹¹⁸ Instead, the church as the people of God has a *telos*, which is *en route*, journeying from a mere existence in temporality toward increasingly realizing, until Christ's return, its existence in God's temporal eternity.

Second, the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit presupposes the filling of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁹ Paul reminds the reader that the church (not individual Christians) is "a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."¹²⁰ In both passages, Paul construes the presence of the Spirit in the church analogical to the "glory" or "name" of God who inhabited Israel's temple.¹²¹ Yet, the "architecture" of the temple is Trinitarian, in

115. Jenson, *STII*, 171.

116. Jenson, *STII*, 190.

117. Jenson, *STII*, 191-192.

118. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 106-107.

119. 1 Cor 3:16, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"

120. Eph 2:21-22.

121. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 145-150.

that the temple is itself one with the risen Christ and is made for the Father, created by the Spirit who acts as “the possibility and energy of service in it.”¹²² The Spirit is God who not only “tabernacles” with his people on this earth but also ushers his people as the holy temple into his Kingdom. Then, subsuming his Kingdom, the temporal eternity of God can be declared as

the unsurpassability of this event: such things as the unconditionality of the gospel-promise, the immunity of sacramental presence to the unbelief of worshipers, the impossibility of building the Kingdom by our labors, are not result or illustrations of God’s infinity, they *are* that infinity. . . . As the Spirit is the Spirit that rests on the Son, eternity is *the inexhaustibility of the Son’s life*.¹²³

The church, therefore, as the temple of the Spirit, offers every Christian the possibility of becoming a partaker of the divine nature for the temporal eternity of God. The temple of the Spirit, accordingly, is the very reality among God’s elect, the “foretaste” or “down-payment” in this temporal life for the life with and in the temporal eternity of God.¹²⁴

Third, when the church is referred to as the body of Christ, it must be understood as an manifested reality. In the New Testament, the body of Christ denotes the physical body of Jesus Christ, the Eucharist’s loaf and cup, and the institution of the church. Yet, although Paul is certain that the risen and ascended Lord is in some sense visibly and spatially present in heaven sitting at the right hand of God the Father, his rendering of the body of Christ is signified exclusively by the Eucharist’s loaf and cup and the church assembled around them.¹²⁵ As a result, the church is the elect who have been baptized into Christ, who partake in the Eucharist’s one bread¹²⁶ and who commune with Jesus Christ *through the Word and Spirit*. Seen in this manner, the church is more than a mere human institution. Jenson observes that, for Paul, the church as “spiritual” body, whatever that may be, is much more than a biological body.¹²⁷ The church, God’s elect which has been raised with Christ

122. Jenson, *STII*, 198.

123. Jenson, *STII*, 219.

124. Jenson, *STII*, 172, 198.

125. Jenson, *STII*, 205.

126. 1 Cor 10:16-17 “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, is one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

127. 1 Cor 15:44, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

from the dead, must learn to imagine itself as having begun to live in God's temporal eternity as the gathering of spiritual bodies resulting from union with the risen Christ. For Jenson, a Lutheran who has been committed to dialog with Roman Catholics, the church *is* the risen body of Christ because the bread and cup in the congregation's midst is the very same body of Christ. Jenson exhorts the church to be serious about claiming its own identity when he says, "It is time for theology . . . to let what Paul meant by 'body' teach us also what to mean by 'body.'"¹²⁸

One does not necessarily have to be committed to the consubstantiation or transubstantiation view of the Eucharist to agree with Jenson here. While such theological constructs are crucial to the understanding of the nature of the Eucharist in time and space, they, along with the memorial view and others, are limited in unlocking the ontological interpenetration of the body of Jesus Christ in his realm, namely, temporal eternity. In God's temporal eternity, the physical body of Jesus Christ, the Eucharist's loaf and cup, and the institution of the church interpenetrate with one another for the benefit of God's elect, who struggle to *realize* and *testify* to their existence in their spiritual bodies in God's temporal eternity. This notion of interpenetration is only possible because God's elect are called to commune with the Triune God of *perichoresis*, as a result of the decisive obedience of Jesus Christ and of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the temporal church. Consequently, the church, as the body of Christ, is *descriptively* present where Jesus Christ is *prescriptively* present by his promise and through the Eucharist.

More importantly, the church *is truly* Christ's body in a sense that "there is and needs to be no other place than the church [except in God's temporal eternity] for him to be embodied, nor in that other place any other entity to be the 'real' body of Christ."¹²⁹ *There* is where human beings can locate him, to respond to his word and enter into the interpenetrating relationship in God's temporal eternity. This is the hope and the very possibility of churchly reform, which can only be possible by the work of the Spirit, who is the manifestation of God directly in the church and through the divine *perichoresis* with Jesus Christ, who exists in the churchly interpenetration for the elect. In this sense, the church is *prescriptively* "the object in the world as which the risen Christ is an object for the world, an available something as which Christ is there to be addressed and grasped."¹³⁰ Just as "to be a creature is, in Christological respect, to be a revelation of God's will . . . a 'created word' from

128. Jenson, *STI*, 205.

129. Jenson, *STI*, 206.

130. Jenson, *STII*, 213.

God,”¹³¹ the church is called to work constantly toward reminding and realizing itself as the manifested reality of the risen Christ’s presence and to proclaim itself as such to the world.¹³²

131. Jenson, *STI*, 45.

132. Jenson, *STII*, 213.