

## REMARKS ON MY CURRENT SCHOLARLY WORK

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My research and creative interests in philosophical theology begin and end in the Christian doctrine of divine trinity. Two components of this interest, which were each addressed in a preliminary way in my Ph. D. dissertation "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Temporal Interpretation" (1972) have become programmatic in somewhat independent ways in the ensuing decade. One of these is the philosophical problem of eternity and time, which became central in the course of my effort to demonstrate the analogy between Martin Heidegger's "temporal interpretation" of human historical finitude and St. Augustine's analysis of memory, understanding and will as the eternal aspect of the human and an image of God. The other is the hermeneutical and finally theological problem of appropriating the New Testament discourse about "Father, Son, and Spirit" in terms which are both contemporary yet responsive to the decisive renovation of trinitarian orthodoxy that was made possible by Augustine, but never taken up with comparable originality thereafter.

The first of these problems led me into the work in Greek philosophy, particularly Neoplatonism, which culminates in the book The Syntax of Time presently being prepared for publication. The second has led to a thorough background study of New Testament hermeneutics, pursued from the point of view of the doctrine of revelation and hence focusing special attention on the genre of "revelation" or "apocalyptic." The constructive goal of this work is the fusion of a positive or "economic" theology of

divine trinity, developed in New Testament terms, with an apophatic or non-theistic, anti-metaphysical stance in philosophy. A synthetic statement from this work will be a book entitled Abyss, Emptiness, Abandon, preliminary studies for which have led to a SUNY Research Foundation fellowship in 1982 ("The Temporal Structure of the New Testament as Revelation"), and the scholarly paper "The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus, and Augustine" for the International Congress on Neoplatonism and Gnosticism in March, 1984.

#### Background and Role of THE SYNTAX OF TIME

I began collecting notes under this title, which I take from the surviving fragment of the seminal Greek philosopher Anaximander, during the period from 1968-1973 when I regularly taught upper-division metaphysics at the University of Santa Clara.

My goal in this period was first to understand and then to make myself independent of the program underlying Martin Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics. In that book Heidegger's career-long fascination with Presocratic Greek philosophy first took on the form of a reversal of Being and Time's "dismantling" engagement of the history of metaphysics. Where the dismantling project had worked backward from Kant through Descartes to Aristotle (implicitly guided by Augustine), and had specified in increasingly explicit and foundational ways the "forgetting of Being" which gives power to metaphysics, the new work leaped back across Aristotle to an epochal "naming of Being" accomplished in archaic Greek physics,

and then moved forward toward him, now in the dimension of the "event of Being" itself and no longer in "the history of Being as metaphysics."

My course in metaphysics was centered in the text of Aristotle's Metaphysics and in an increasingly autonomous study of the Presocratic writers over against whom Aristotle positioned himself in Book Alpha of that work. In many ways the research underlying the development of this course confirmed Heidegger's method and leading questions. But on many points of detail, his essentially allusive and obscurely motivated, even uncontrolled interpretations became increasingly unsatisfying. This was especially the case with Parmenides, and in 1971 I began the research in fragment 8 of the "Way of Truth" which <sup>led</sup> in 1978 to the paper "Parmenides and the Need for Eternity," the first of the studies intended for The Syntax of Time.

My desire to break clear of Heidegger led me in 1975 to abandon all efforts to participate in the discussion of Heidegger in contemporary theology for the time being, and to turn instead to the historical role of Augustine in metaphysics and theology, which I see as decisive for any theological ontology in the wake of Heidegger. It had already become clear to me in the dissertation that Augustine's ontology had to be seen as a last moment of Greek philosophy, especially of the Neoplatonic form in which he encountered it, rather than as the first moment of the Latin systematics which in Thomas Aquinas and other medieval writers set the agenda for modern philosophy with its subjective and transcendental maneuvers.

In apprenticeship to A. H. Armstrong for a semester, I began the

study of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition which has led to most of my scholarly work in recent years. At the core of this effort has been my struggle to master the Greek philosophical conception of eternity, which is misunderstood to the point of slander in the critique of "substance metaphysics" shared by contemporary process, historicist, and existentialist theologies. Contemporary criticism goes wrong both through a misreading of the notion of eternity, and through a recurrent superficiality in the phenomenology of the time from which eternity is distinguished.

Eternity gets taken as "timelessness," either existentially as lifeless stasis or logically as abstract tenselessness. Time gets identified with the seriality in becoming and process whose representation is the domain of the variable 't' in Cartesian analytic geometry and whose only privilege is a weakly justified "independence" in the parametric equations of physical mechanics. From both sides, these contemporary presuppositions completely preclude insight into the Greek view, for which eternity is paradigmatic timeliness, and time the image of eternity. Not a negation which disperses unity, time is a form of perfection in Platonic thought, super-added to the seriality in sensible motion as the power for its participation in intelligible being.

Because my constructive position in trinitarian theology requires a generalization of the Plotinian conception of eternity as an 'eternal present', to embrace also an 'eternal having been' and an 'eternal future', it became important for me to master the particular orientation to the phenomenology of time that led to the classic projection of a transcendent

and paradigmatic presence. In the course of this work I have uncovered a Greek way of making time thematic in physics and speculative logic which has consequences of the kind mapped out in Heidegger's problematic of temporality, but which is anterior to temporality phenomenologically and ontologically, in a direction I have come to believe Heidegger badly understands.

In The Syntax of Time my point of departure is Husserl rather than Heidegger, and my route is to Aristotle through Plotinus rather than Augustine. The project is propaedeutic for the project in trinitarian theology, in part substantively, in view of the role of eternity in the latter, in part methodologically, since The Syntax of Time prescind entirely from theological matters in a conscious act of 'deconstruction' more radical than dialectical atheism and more thoroughgoing than philosophical naturalism and humanism.

My goal is to prepare for a 'transcendental' move in the interpretation of historical finitude which is completely independent of the problematic of subjectivity. Though it will have much in common with the later Heidegger, it will be grounded directly in New Testament theology and the history of the doctrine of the trinity, and will no longer be an 'application' of Heidegger to theology. The urgent need is to overcome all extrinsic appeals to 'philosophy' in theology, and to recover theology as a philosophical work in itself, both in general systematic strategy, and in the specific competence the theologian must be prepared to exercise and defend.

The ambition and risk of The Syntax of Time is to present a series

of studies that have standing as contributions to philosophy, entirely apart from any theological interests or sympathy in their reader. For the reasons outlined, this is for me an intrinsically theological necessity.

Prospectus for ABYSS, EMPTINESS, ABANDON

Suppose an audience for whom some kind of Pythagorean or Hindu reincarnation system is familiar. Human being is caught up in the Wheel of Karma, doomed to pass through endless re-embodiments unless it awakes to its perfect freedom or become enlightened. There are stories of certain sages who were prodigies of memory, who remembered tens or thousands of previous lives on the road to their enlightenment.

To such an audience it would be easy to say what distinguished Jesus of Nazareth, portrayed as an Enlightened One as well as the Christ of faith: he was born, and he lived, and he died—and it was enough for him.

It is empty common sense and smallness of thought, Heidegger writes in Introduction to Metaphysics, to suppose that everything great must endure forever, and to confuse such enduring with eternity. To the contrary, what is great has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Finitude and the epochal is the disclosure space for all revelation, including the Christian revelation of resurrection and eternal life.

Jesus is not portrayed in Christian myth as an Enlightened One but as an Anointed One, and therefore as a figure in a sacred history



that has a different dimension than the lifetime of an individual. He is finally represented as the Son of God, a figure in the self-unfolding of the divine life in eternity. In this role his historical particularity has always led Christian philosophy into highly original explorations of the relationship between eternity and time. These have been shaped most of all by the theology of revelation worked out in the Fourth Gospel in the form of a doctrine of divine trinity—Father revealed by Son in the pouring out of a common Spirit.

In a book to be called Abyss, Emptiness, Abandon I want to show how the doctrine of divine trinity is a doctrine of the finitude of eternity itself, the disclosure space of divine being. On another level I will be arguing the historicity of divine being, recovering the force of the oldest economic trinitarian theologies for which God is as he is revealed. Most of these theologies blundered into modalism in order to be historical, having God be Father from the beginning until the birth of Christ, then Son for thirty years or so, and nowadays Holy Spirit. These are heresies in the doctrine, but they are also wrong-headed constructions of the temporal structure of historicity. History does not come apart as past, present, and future, as though these were adjoining parts or segments of a divided line, but it comes together as past, present, and future, since these are at all times the interior horizons of historical existence itself.

These three are not time but temporality. Human being, embedded in time, has historical or temporal truth only 'ecstatically', through a privileged participation in a transcending 'destiny of Being'. Divine

being, life under its eternal aspect, is not non-temporal but transcendently temporal. Its role in the destiny of being is not participation but the giving of form. It opens the having-been-ness in which the human is always 'already in' and predisposed in its possibilities; it prepares the way for the neighboring presence in which the human dwells, builds, and thinks 'alongside' nature and the world; and it antecedently undergoes the finality in which the human 'comes toward itself' guilty of finitude. This summary uses the language of Heidegger. In the way I formulated this transcendent temporality in my dissertation, God is "transcendently archaic, eternal, and free."

In work since then in New Testament hermeneutics, I have become more suspicious of all efforts to argue from the temporality of the revelation of God as trinity to a positive ontology of the divine life 'in itself'. My renunciation is not just of metaphysical efforts to construct a God 'beyond history', but of all kataphatic or positive efforts to do a 'theology of history' nailed down, so to speak, in the 'life of Jesus'.

Recovery of the development of Christian doctrine along a variety of trajectories during the First Century has shown that the New Testament itself is a cross-section of a process of 'letting Jesus go', which culminates theologically and, as we can now see, chronologically, in the utter transfiguration of Jesus which makes possible the realized eschatology of the Fourth Gospel. Both the loss and the recovery involved in this transfiguration are quite reflective in the Gospel of John, which in self-interpretive on the issue, in the trinitarian theology of revelation worked out in the Last Supper discourse of chapters 14-16.



The oldest manifestation of the trinitarian structure of the 'revelation of God in Christ' is the baptismal icon set at the beginning of the synoptic narrative (Mark 1, rooted in the Old Kerygma as preserved in for example Acts 10: 37). The baptismal scene itself is not a narrative element but an iconic one, an image rather than a story. In the space in which the Father's saying resounds, the Son rises from the waters as the new creation and the Spirit descends from the heaven as the new freedom and principle of life. The invisible Father is visible as the frame, the enclosure and therefore the declaration, of the meeting of the new being and the new spirit.

In the Fourth Gospel, which I argue has a thoroughly self-conscious relation to the gospel as represented in Mark, the icon is unfolded into the hermeneutical principle which controls the relationship in Christian imagination between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ present in spirit and power in the eucharistic community. Mark already loops appearances of the risen Christ back into the journey of Jesus from baptism to death; not just the Transfiguration on the mountain but the feeding of the multitudes, the walking on water, and many other moments are the 'missing' resurrection appearances. John carries this looping and transfiguration to its logical extreme: the near-complete preemption of the earthly Jesus by the Eternal Son. The Last Supper discourse both acknowledges this and spells out its principle.

In that discourse we hear Jesus say what he did not say 'from the beginning', because we 'could not bear it', but which, when we do hear it 'in the Spirit' who 'leads into all the truth', we hear from

Jesus, remembered up so to speak, so that the Spirit 'does not <sup>see it</sup> ~~hear~~ on its own, but what it hears it declares'.

The 'coming again' of Jesus is the letting go of Jesus, the turning away from the receding vision of the one who has 'gone to the Father' to the one who 'goes before us' always. This is the 'emptying' made famous in the great Hymn of the Son in Philippians, whose synthesis with the Johannine theme of the incarnation of the Son in all his glory is still highly problematic.

The most far-reaching effort to accomplish such a synthesis is the death of God theology, with its profoundly rigorous kenotic Christology. But because it is at bottom Hegelian, it is patripassionist and heretical. It has it that the aboriginal and transcendent Father, who dwells in unapproachable light and heavenly 'aboveness', has 'emptied himself' of transcendence and become immanent in the mode of historical finitude—a human voice, a human destiny, a human dying. Though it seeks to deconstruct the metaphysical God, it achieves only a deconstruction of the 'pre-existent Son', and gets no further than the emptiness of God. It does not recover the abyss of the Father, into which the emptying takes place. It knows the abandon, the reckless abandon of this emptying, but only in the Son. It does not have 'the Father and the Son'.

My project is to negate the metaphysical God in all three horizons of historicity, the eternal past, the eternal future, the eternal present alike. Divine is the abyss, the emptiness, and the abandon of historical freedom. Exposed to the abyss, falling into it with abandon, human being is the imago dei. Deus is not, apart from this, a foundation, an exemption,

or a vindication of folly and blindness. God is as he is revealed. "Let us make man to our image and likeness" is the conjury of the gods, not their authority or power. The One Divine that finds itself 'in Christ' is infinitely finite, infinitely temporal, infinitely relative and null.

The apophatic or the 'negative' theology today finds Godhead not beyond the trinity but in it. Opening the abyss, preparing the emptiness, and volunteering the abandon, the divine life is transcendently archaic, eternal, and free.

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