LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF RELIGION

THE ETERNALITY OF THE IMMUTABLE GOD IN THE THOUGHT OF PAUL HELM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF RELIGION

IN CANDICY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BY

RONNIE P. CAMPBELL JR.

28 MAY 2008

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

Grade	Date
Dr. Edward Martin, Thesis Mentor	Date
Dr. John Morrison, Reader	Date

Copyright © 2008 by Ronnie P. Campbell Jr.
All Rights Reserved

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Edward Martin and Dr. John Morrison, for their countless hours spent on this project. Both members provided keen insight and critical commentary, of which, I am deeply indebted.

Further, I could not have overcome this task without the constant encouragement of my loving wife, Debbie, who sacrificed hours so that this project could proceed.

Lastly, I would like to thank my little girl, Abby Grace. She makes each and everyday bright and wonderful, a constant reminder of God's grace.

ABSTRACT

Paul Helm, professor of theology and philosophy at Highland Theological Institute, has written extensively on God's relation to time. Following in the tradition of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas, Helm upholds God's temporal mode of existence as timelessness. This thesis seeks to determine whether Helm and other eternalists are justified in holding that God's temporal mode of existence is atemporal in light of the doctrines of incarnation and creation. Central to this inquiry is whether God is strongly immutable. In conclusion, this thesis argues that while the divine timeless view is coherent, it rests on an untenable notion of strong immutability. Scripture teaches that God is immutable in His essence, character, decree, plan and purposes, yet, it also affirms that God changes in His actions and in His relationships toward his creatures. Furthermore, in order to maintain the divine timeless view, Helm and other eternalists must appeal to a B-theory of time, which raises several philosophical and theological objections. Lastly, this thesis argues for a synthesis approach to God's temporal mode of existence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT v

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

1. DIVINE TIMELESSNESS AS GOD'S TEMPORAL MODE OF EXISTENCE 3

   Philosophical-Theological Basis for Divine Timelessness

   Paul Helm's Defense of the Classical Medieval View of Divine Timelessness

2. DIVINE IMMUTABILITY, CREATION AND INCARNATION 31

   The Doctrine of Immutability

   Change, Creation and Incarnation

3. OMNITEMPORALITY AS GOD'S TEMPORAL MODE OF EXISTENCE 84

   Temporalism: A Balance between Transcendence and Immanence

   Two Models of God's Temporal Mode of Existence

CONCLUSION 106

BIBLIOGRAPHY 109

INTRODUCTION

Paul Helm, professor of theology and philosophy at Highland Theological Institute,[1] has written extensively on God's relation to time. Following the classical medieval view, Helm upholds God's temporal mode of existence as timelessness.[2] This thesis seeks to determine whether Paul Helm and other eternalists[3] are justified in holding that God's temporal mode of existence is atemporal in light of the doctrines of incarnation and creation. Central to this inquiry is whether God is strongly immutable.[4] I shall argue that while Helm presents a coherent view of divine eternity, such a view rests on an untenable doctrine of strong immutability. Further, it remains possible for the Christian theist to maintain God's immutability without rendering God as absolutely and in all ways mutable.[5]

---

[1] Paul Helm, *Eternalism Contra Craig*, http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2008/01/eternalism-contra-craig.html. (April 3, 2008).

[2] In the literature of philosophical theology, the terms 'timelessness,' 'atemporal,' and 'eternal' are used synonymously. By timeless, Helm means that God is not in time, He has no history, and hence there is no past or future for God, only His present. Similar to Boethius, God has before Him the entirety of His life existing without any succession or change. See Paul Helm, *Eternal God, A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 24; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V: VI.

[3] Helm refers to his own position of divine timelessness as the 'eternalist' position or 'eternalism.' Henceforth, eternalism will be used to describe the position that God's temporal mode of existence is timeless. [See Paul Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," in *God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory Ganssle* (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press. 2001), 30.]

[4] Paul Helm, *Eternal God,* 94. Christian theists use the term immutability differently. The word 'strong' will be used throughout the remainder of the essay to differentiate the eternalist's view of immutability from other uses of the word. By strongly immutable the eternalist means that God does not change nor could He ever change. Aquinas describes God as "altogether immutable." See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1 Q. 9 Art. 1.

[5] Bruce Ware distinguishes between God's "ontological" and "ethical" immutability and God's "relational" mutability. He argues that God's relational mutability expresses more clearly God's unchangingness "because God's intrinsic moral nature is unchangeable it must always and without fail express itself in ways appropriate to the moral state of any given human situation. Thus, when the human moral state changes (e.g. from rebellion to repentance) the immutable divine nature must now reflect itself in ways that are appropriate to this new situation." See Bruce A. Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of

Thus, this thesis will unfold in the following way. First, chapter one examines the philosophical and theological bases for divine timelessness, followed by Paul Helms formulation and defense of the eternalist view. Afterwards, I shall assess whether the doctrine of divine timelessness is coherent. Chapter two brings into question the eternalist doctrine of strong immutability and presents two objections to the eternalist's conception of divine timelessness and strong immutability based on the classical Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation. Lastly, in chapter three, I shall then suggest a possible model for understanding God's temporal mode of existence.

---

the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," in the *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Dec. 1986), 434, 436, & 438m 440.

CHAPTER ONE

DIVINE TIMELESSNESS AS GOD'S TEMPORAL MODE OF EXISTENCE

Regarding God's relation to the space-time world, Philosophical theologians have historically employed two models – God as "timeless"[1] and God as "everlasting"[2] – to express God's temporal mode of existence.[3] By timelessness as God's temporal mode of existence, the eternalist means that God exists without temporal location or extension. God does not exist in time, nor does God have a history consisting of a past, present or future.[4] Brian Leftow sums up the eternalist position when he says:

---

[1] Modern proponents of the timeless view include: Paul Helm, *Eternal God, A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity." *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 78, No. 8 (Aug., 1981), 429-458; Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[2] Modern proponents of the everlasting view include: John Feinberg, *No One Like* Him; Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970); Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 211; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78. By "everlasting," also known as "temporalism," philosophical theologians mean that God exists *in* time. But the question that will be raised in chapter three concerns what temporalists mean by "in time." For it would seem that if God created time, along with everything else at the moment of creation, then God would not be a necessary being, since, He began to exist with time. On the other hand, if time has always existed, then God could not be a necessary being, since, God would depend on something other than Himself for His existence.

[3] Philosophers of religion often reserve judgment as to which view best represents God's relation to time See Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 83; Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Vancouver: Regent Press, 1991), 138. Others seek a modified view. William Lane Craig and Thomas Senor advocate a view that God has two phases to His life: one timeless and one temporal. William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 233; Senor, Thomas. "Divine Temporality and Creation Ex Nihilo." In *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 10 No. 1 (January 1993), 87. Alan Padgett offers a second modified view of God's relation to time, which he calls "relative timelessness." By relative timelessness Padgett means that God's "time is immeasurable." Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 123-130.

> If God is timeless, God exists, but exists at no time. Thus God bears no temporal relation to any temporal *relatum*—God does not exist or act earlier than, later than, or at the same time as any such thing. If God is timeless, such truths as 'God exists' are timeless truths: though they are true, they are not true at any time.[5]

Contra the timeless view, some argue that God is everlasting, i.e., His temporal mode of existence is "in time."[6] Richard Swinburne maintains that God is "a being such that however far back in time you count years you do not reach the beginning of its existence."[7] Some temporalists doubt the coherence of the doctrine of divine timelessness. They argue that such a doctrine does not fit well with other Christian beliefs, and that it entered into Christian thought through Greek philosophy. For instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff believes that early Christians were problematically influenced by Greek metaphysics. He thinks such Greek thought is contradictory to biblical thought and concludes that the only way to remove the Hellenistic tradition is through removing the timelessly eternal view of God.[8] "God the Redeemer," claims Wolterstorff, "is a God who *changes*. And any being which changes is a being among whose states there is

---

[4] Nash, 73; Pike, 15; Helm, *Eternal God*, 23-24.

[5] Leftow, 20.

[6] It is important to distinguish "standard temporalism" from "omnitemporalism." Standard temporalism refers to God "in time" but does not qualify what is meant by "in time;" whereas, omnitemporalism, as will be shown in chapter three, recognizes that God's time, which is metaphysical time, cannot be the same as physical clock time or even cosmic time. According to omnitemporalism, God completely transcends created space-time, since He is the Creator of space-time, yet, He is available to all times that ever exist. There are, however, differences of opinion as to whether metaphysical time is measured by cosmic time or whether metaphysical time is immeasurable.

[7] Swinburne, 211.

[8] Swinburne, 217; Wolterstorff, 79; Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, translated by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, nd.); 65. In *God, Time, and Knowledge*, William Hasker argues that the doctrine of divine timelessness is coherent; nevertheless, such a view requires that God's knowledge of temporal realities is a "timeless representation" of them, which Hasker finds hard to accept. See *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 169-170.

temporal succession."[9] Similarly, Clark Pinnock retorts:

> The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time when God does not exist. Timelessness limits God. If he were timeless, God would be unable to work salvation in history, would be cut off from the world, have no real relationship with people and would be completely static.[10]

Thus this chapter seeks to examine the coherence of the eternalist view. I shall begin by examining the philosophical-theological bases for the doctrine of divine timelessness. This will be followed by a presentation of Paul Helm's defense of the classical medieval view. I shall then examine not only what Helm and the medieval theologians believed concerning divine timelessness but their justification for holding to the doctrine of divine timelessness. Finally, I shall assess the strengths and weaknesses of the divine timelessness view.

Philosophical-Theological Bases for Divine Timelessness

Historically, the classical medieval view has been that God is timeless.[11] According to Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, the view that God is timelessly eternal entered into Christian thought because of influence of Greek philosophy. Concerning the development of the Greek concept of eternity, Stump and Kretzmann argue that the Greek notion of eternity "would not be out of keeping with the tradition that runs though Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus into Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas . . ."[12]

---

[9] Wolterstorff, 78.

[10] Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 121.

[11] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V: VI; Anselm, *Monologium*, Books XVIII-XXIV; and Anselm, *Proslogium*, Books XIII, XIX-XX; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 10; and Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1: 15.

[12] Stump and Kretzmann, 445.

Whether a full-blown understanding of divine timelessness, as found in Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas, existed among the earliest Christians is unclear; nevertheless, working from creation *ex nihilo* several of the Fathers understood God as both "immutable" and "eternal" and spoke of God as having "no time," because time, they claim, along with everything else, came into existence through the Creator. It is impossible for God to exist within time, for if God were in time, He would be bound by it, but it is impossible for God to be bound by anything.[13] In what follows, I shall examine the four primary contributors to the Christian tradition that God is timeless: Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas.

Augustine of Hippo

For Augustine, time is a created thing along with the rest of creation, consisting of past, present and future. The present, for Augustine, is similar to a mathematical point, dividing the past from the future; but without duration.[14] Unlike the present, the past is no more, while the future is not yet. Hence, the present is all that truly exists. He claims: "Who will see that all past time is driven back by the future, that all the future is consequent on the past, and all past and future are created and take their course from that which is ever present?"[15] Such a process is necessary, for, if there is no passage of time

[13] See Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, IV, V; Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, II; Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, B.1. 2:14, B.1. 9:61

[14] Augustine, *Confessions*, 11: 15; Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 84.

[15] Augustine, *Confessions*, 11: 14.

then the present would not be considered as time, but as eternity. Time, claims Augustine, "tends toward non-being."[16]

In contrast to creation, which is in such constant transience, an infinite being exists apart from time. Augustine reasons, "[a]t no time, therefore, did you do nothing, since you had made time itself. No times are coeternal with you, because you are permanent, whereas if they were permanent, they would not be times." [17] God cannot be involved in the process of time that involves change; rather, an infinite being must be exempt from all change. For in eternity there is no "passing away" but only "the whole present."[18] God's life exists all at once. There are no stages to His life. Reflecting on God's eternity Augustine explains:

> It is not in time that you precede time: elsewise you would not precede all times. You precede all past times in the sublimity of an ever present eternity, and you surpass all future times, because they are to come, and when they come, they shall be past, 'but you are the Selfsame, and your years shall not fail'….Your years are one day, and your day is not each day, but today, because with you today does not give way to tomorrow, nor does it succeed yesterday. With you, today is eternity….You have made all times, and you are before all times, and not at any time was there no time.[19]

Because God created time, He cannot be part of or participate in it. An infinite being must transcend time while remaining untouched by the effects of time.

Throughout the *Confessions* it becomes clear that Augustine formulates his notion of God's timelessness from a basis in strong immutability. At one place he comments, "God's will belongs to his very substance. But if anything has appeared in God's

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 11: 14

[19] Ibid., 11: 13.

substance that previously was not there, then that substance is not truly called eternal."[20] What God has willed, He has eternally willed. In addition, an immutable and timeless God cannot grow in knowledge nor can He change in His "activity."[21]

Boethius

Boethius defines eternity as "the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life."[22] His distinction, between what does and does not make an object eternal, hinges on his understanding of the present. God's present is different than that of our own present in that God possesses His whole life at once whereas the creaturely present progresses through time. Even if the world is "everlasting," it is not considered eternal, because, it has parts and changes through time, losing yesterday and gaining tomorrow. According to Boethius, "[i]n this life of today you do not live more fully than in that fleeting and transitory moment."[23] What distinguishes God's infinite life from our own is the fullness that His life always possesses, i.e., a life without change, for better or for worse. Just as God's life exists with no change, so does His infinite knowledge. Boethius explains:

> His knowledge, too, transcends all temporal change and abides in the immediacy of His presence. It embraces all the infinite recesses of past and future and views them in the immediacy of its knowing as though they are happening in the present.…[a]nd if human and divine present may be compared, just as you see certain things in this your present time, so God sees all things in His eternal present ….the divine gaze looks down on all things without disturbing their nature, to Him they are present things, but under the condition of time they are future things.[24]

---

[20] Ibid., 11: 10.

[21] Ibid., 11: 31.

[22] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V: VI.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

God sees the whole extent and infinite process of past and future events in His immediate present. There is nothing excluded from His knowledge. God does not discover or recall what will happen, but sees future events as the present, despite the fact that they have not yet occurred in our understanding of the temporal process.

Anselm of Canterbury

According to Anselm, God is "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought."[25] Here, Anselm recognizes that God is already the greatest conceivable being. He cannot grow in greatness nor can He decrease in His being. Thus, this provides a theological reflective context for Anselm by which he can formulate a proper concept of God. From this, i.e., God is "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, Anselm concludes that God is both spaceless and timeless.

> All that which is enclosed in any way by place or time is less than that which no law of place or time constrains. Since, then, nothing is greater than You, no place or time confines You but You exist everywhere and always. And because this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal.[26]

If God had temporal or spatial location and extension, then He could not be the Supreme Being, for God would be confined. But God cannot be confined by anyone or anything. If God exists apart from any temporal or spatial location and extension, then God must be timeless. Anselm continues:

> Indeed You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow are completely in time; however, You, though nothing can be without You, are nevertheless not in place or time but all things are in You. For nothing contains You, but you contain all things.[27]

---

[25] Anselm, *Proslogium*, 3.

[26] *Proslogium* 13.

[27] *Proslogium* 19.

In the *Monologium,* Anselm asserts that the Supreme Being "exists either everywhere and always (i.e. in every place and time), or only somewhere and sometime (i.e. limited to some place and some time), or nowhere and never (i.e. in no place or time)."[28] As Anselm works out what it means for a Supreme Being to exist at every place and time, at first he concludes that God's existing at every place and time would be a contradiction. For such a being to exist in its entirety in every place and every time would mean that it consists of parts. However, because the "Supreme Being" is "supremely simple" and "supremely unchangeable," then, it could not exist in parts.[29]

> But how can something exist as a whole simultaneously in individual times, unless those times are simultaneous? Suppose, on the other hand, that it exists as a whole in individual times severally and distinctly. . . In this case we should, properly, say that it was, is and will be. In which case its time-span is not simultaneously a whole. Rather it is stretched out in parts through the parts of time. But its time-span is its eternity and its eternity is precisely itself. The supreme essence, therefore, would be cut up into parts along the divisions of time. For if its life span is drawn out along the course of time, it must have, as time does, a present, past and future. But what is its life span, the duration of its existence, but its eternity? So, since its eternity is nothing but its essence (as proved above), if its eternity has past, present, and future, then its essence also must have past, present, and future.[30]

Whatever it means for God to be eternal, it is to be identified with His nature and His other attributes. Anselm believes that it is better for God to be one, i.e., unchangeable simplicity verses changeable parts. Therefore, Anselm concludes that the word "always", when speaking of the divine substance, is nothing other than God's eternity, i.e. "life unending, simultaneous, whole, and perfectly existing."[31]

---

[28] *Monologium*, 20.

[29] *Monologium*, 21.

[30] Ibid.

[31] *Monologium*, 24.

Thomas Aquinas

"Thus eternity is known from two sources," says Aquinas, "first, because what is eternal is interminable—that is, has no beginning nor end (that is, no term either way); secondly, because eternity has no succession, being simultaneously whole."[32] For Aquinas, God's eternality is grounded in a strong immutability. If God is immutable, He is "supremely immutable."[33] He lists three arguments to support God's absolute changelessness. First, because God is the "first being," He must be pure act, i.e., He can have no potentiality. All potentiality, claims Aquinas, comes after an act. To say that God has potentiality would be to insist that He was not pure act.[34] Secondly, Aquinas argues that anything which changes exists in part, and thus if God exists in part then He could not be "altogether simple."[35] God, as Spirit, does not have hands, feet, or any other body part. He is neither made up of material substance, nor can He be in time, since time is made up of parts; rather, He exists without composition. [36] Aquinas' third argument insists that anything that changes, changes either for the better or for the worst. Since God is infinite and perfect, He cannot change, for to do so would cause Him either to become greater than He is or to diminish in His greatness. [37]

---

[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I of I, Q. 10, Art. 1.

[33] Ibid., Part I of I, Q. 10, Art. 2.

[34] Ibid. Part I of I, Q. 10, Art. 1. Aquinas provides a similar argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. He claims: "The being whose substance has an admixture of potency is liable not to be by as much as it has potency; for that which can be, cannot not-be. But, God, being everlasting, in His substance cannot not-be." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1:16:2.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid. In contrast to the *Summa Theologica*, where Aquinas begins with divine simplicity, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas' earlier work, places divine timelessness before divine simplicity. See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1:18:2.

[37] Ibid.

If God's absolute timelessness follows from His absolute immutability, could there be any real relation between God and His creatures? Aquinas insists:

> Therefore, there is no real relation in God to His creature, whereas in creatures there is a real relation to God, because creatures are contained under the divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God. On the other hand, the divine processions are in the same nature. Hence no parallel exists.[38]

This does not mean that God is impersonal, nor does it mean that He has no real relations; rather, God's relations are within God. Aquinas explains: "the Father is denominated only from paternity, and the Son only from filiation. Therefore, if no real paternity of filiation existed in God, it would follow that God is not really Father or Son, but only in our manner of understanding."[39] If there were no real relations within God, then there would be no real distinction between the Father and the Son.

But the objection naturally arises, what of those instances in scripture when God is said to respond to His creatures, e.g. "draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you"?[40] When scripture speaks in this way, Aquinas argues, it is speaking metaphorically, "[f]or as the sun is said to enter a house, or to go out, according as its rays reach the house, so God is said to approach to us, or to recede from us, when we receive the influx of His goodness, or decline from Him."[41]

---

[38] Ibid. Part I of I, Q. 28. Art. 1.

[39] Ibid., Part I of I, Q. 28. Art. 2.

[40] Ibid., Part I of I, Q. 9. Art. 1. Obj. 3.

[41] Ibid.

Paul Helm's Defense of the Classical Medieval View Of Divine Timelessness

Justification for Divine Timelessness

Why think that God is timeless? According to Helm, eternalists rest their notion of divine timeless on a certain intuition of "divine fullness."[42] The everlasting view, claims Helm, is not unintelligible. We can conceive of God existing in time, yet, exist without growing older as we grow older. God's memory can remain intact. While this might mean that God is not simple, i.e., without parts, He nevertheless can remember all past events as vividly as when they occurred. But the problem that Helm has with the everlasting view is that, if God goes through a succession of events (from the past to the future), then it would seem that God has "lost" the present.[43] Helm claims:

> Now suppose that God is in time in the sort of way that we are in time. It follows that he has a past, a present and a future. Perhaps (making the reasonable supposition that he has always existed) he has a past (p. 29) that is backwardly everlasting. There never was a time when God was not. It follows that there are segments of his life—those segments that existed before the present moment—which together constitute a part of God's life that is over and done with. And the eternalist will say that such an idea is incompatible with God's fullness and self-sufficiency.[44]

God could never regain the past, even if He could remember those events which occurred with perfect vividness.[45] Such a view is incompatible with God's sovereignty, His perfection and His "fullness of being."[46]

---

[42] Paul Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity." In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 29.

[43] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity" 30.

[44] Ibid., 29-30.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 31.

The objection may arise: "Does not scripture portray a portrait of a God who is everlasting and who acts in time." Helm acknowledges that it is true that Scripture speaks of God 'acting' within time, but, it is not at all clear that we should understand these statements of God's acting in time literally. Could not the language be anthropomorphic? After all, the authors of scripture employ such metaphorical language when they speak of God as having 'wings' or 'hands.' Helm suggests that Scripture does not clearly lean one way or another with regard to God's temporal mode of existence. When the Psalmist writes in Psalm 90:2, "before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou are God," it could be that the writer used poetic license, extending the use of a hyperbole. Thus, it cannot be easily concluded that Scriptural language, which appears *prima facie* to speak of God in time, does so.[47]

In addition, Helm argues that it seems implausible to use strict scriptural terms for time and eternity as the absolute basis for forming any "biblical" doctrine of God's relationship to time. Helm reasons that what should be important in forming our view of God's relationship to time is not so much a study of *time* words found in scripture; rather one should seek a "reflective context" to formulate proper metaphysical and doctrinal concepts. Take for example, "a geocentric view of the universe."[48] Helm argues:

---

[47] Helm, *Eternal God*, 3.

[48] Ibid., 5-6. We concede to Helm on this point, but I am not at all sure that scripture's "lack" of definitions of time words suggests that we can form no conclusions about the Hebrew metaphysic of time. As Harry Poe identifies, embedded in language itself are reflections of human thought processes. Hebrew verbs, claims Poe, do not distinguish between past, present, and future; rather, they stress the "quality of the action." See Harry Poe, "The Problem of Time in Biblical Perspective," in *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley (Waco: Baylor University, 2005), 10.

> Did the biblical writers accept or reject a geocentric view of the universe? If it can be shown that they rejected it, then, a geocentric account of the universe is inconsistent with what the biblical writers teach. If it can be shown that they accepted it, then it forms part of their teaching, or at least part of the background to their teaching. But if it can be shown that they neither accepted nor rejected it then we must conclude that with respect to whether or not the universe is geocentric their writings leave this an open issue.[49]

He concludes by recognizing the shortage of such words found in the Scriptures and a lack of true definitions of 'time' and 'eternity'. Nevertheless, while Scripture provides no such time words, it does, however, provide the "raw data" necessary in formulating such a doctrine.[50]

Given that scripture provides a "reflective context" for developing a doctrine of divine timelessness, Helm formulates his concept of God's eternality based on three primary sources: "the data of Scripture coupled with *a priori* reflection on the ideas of the divine fullness and aseity and on the Creator-creature distinction" [51] and from certain conclusions implied by the cosmological arguments for the existence of God, i.e., "from the fact of change to the existence of a Changeless One imply that it is impossible for the Changeless One to change."[52]

Consequently, the doctrine of divine immutability is again the basis for divine timelessness. By immutability, Helm means that God does not or could not change in any sense.[53] According to Helm, "a person is immutable if there is no respect in which he

---

[49] Ibid., 6.

[50] Ibid., 4-6.

[51] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 34.

[52] Ibid.

[53] The term 'immutability' is used differently by Christian theists. The word 'strong' will be used throughout the remainder of the essay to differentiate the eternalist's view of immutability from other uses of the word.

could really change,"[54] and "[i]t is not that God is immutable because he is unwilling to change, but because his perfect nature is such that he need not and cannot change."[55] Immutability in the strong sense excludes even "temporal or spatial 'merely Cambridge' changes."[56] But why must God be immutable in this strong sense? Rather than arguing that God is timeless because He is immutable, Helm proposes that divine timelessness secures God's immutability.[57] For Helm, only a God who is immutable in the strong sense can perform those duties attributed to God by Scripture, but at the same time, only a God who is timeless secures a strong immutability. Helm provides four ways to understand God's immutability.

(a) God is immutable if in fact his character never changes.
(b) God is immutable if his character could not change.
(c) God is immutable if in fact nothing about him changes
(d) God is immutable if nothing about him could change.[58]

He rejects both (a) and (b) because these two options leave open the possibility of persons other than God are immutable. He gives the example of an individual that might be "uniformly brave" or "stupid" or such a person that is "incorrigible" could exhibit the same kind of immutability in (a) and (b) that is attributed to God. As far as (c) is concerned, such an understanding of immutability, if left open, could suggest that in a

[54] Helm, *Eternal God*, 86.

[55] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 35. Similarly, Aquinas asserts "it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable." [Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.Q.9 A.1.]

[56] Ibid., 19. According to J. M. E. McTaggart, a Cambridge change has taken place when a certain proposition concerning object x is true at time t^1 but may be considered false at time t^2. [J. M. McT. E. McTaggart "Time" in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter Van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 70.] Similarly Swinburne defines Cambridge changes as "a thing *x* changes if some predicate 'φ' applies to it at one time, but not at another. Thus my tie has changed if it was clean yesterday, but is not clean today." [Swinburne, 212.]

[57] Helm, *Eternal God*, 20.

[58] Ibid., 86.

possible world *w'*, that a certain immutable individual as (c) might not be immutable. Therefore, one is left with (d).[59] Immutability in this sense means that God exists as "essential total changelessness."[60] But if God is timelessly immutable, then how can He be involved with creation?

Like Augustine *et al.*, Helm thinks the doctrine of timelessness is justified by drawing "a proper distinction between the Creator and the creature."[61] Instead of arguing from God's immutability to God's timelessness, Helm begins with asserting a difference between finite and infinite existence. His argument is as follows:

(1) Whatever is created is finite.
(2) Whatever is finite is mutable.
(3) Whatever is mutable is in time. Therefore,
(4) Whatever is created is in time.
And
(5) Whatever is the creator is infinite.
(6) Whatever is infinite is immutable.
(7) Whatever is immutable is outside time. Therefore,
(8) Whatever is the creator is outside time.[62]

Helm believes that premises (1) and (5) are based on two principles found in Scripture. The first principle is that God, as creator, has been understood in Christian theology as an "infinite spirit."[63] Secondly, all of creation came into existence *ex nihilo*, i.e. out of nothing. God as "infinite spirit" creates all things and as created are *other* than God. A finite creator would be dependent on something for its existence and a creation out of

[59] Ibid., 87.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid. Helm's argument is similar to Augustine's when Augustine claims "[l]o, heaven and earth exist: they cry out that they have been created, for they are subject to change and variation. Whatever has not been made, and yet exists, has nothing in it which was not previously there, whereas to have what once was not is to change and vary." [Augustine, *The Confessions*, 280.]

[62] Ibid., 19.

[63] Ibid.

pre-existing material would imply that either something exists co-eternally with God or that God could not be the creator of everything that is.

Divine Timelessness and Divine Act

If God is timelessly eternal and strongly immutable, could such a being act within time and directly care for His creation? Helm's answer is "no." God does not directly act within time, for God's acting within time in response to His creatures would mean that God is temporal.

> A timeless being may not act within the universe, yet it makes sense to say that such a being produces (tenseless) the universe. The production of the universe is thus not the production of some event or complex of events in time; it is the production of the whole material universe, time included.[64]

What Helm is saying here is that God's producing the universe is in actuality God's producing the entire space-time universe through one eternal act, including all its scattered temporal events. God's producing and sustaining of the universe is grounded in God's unchanging will. But Helm is quick to point out that God's willing a change is not the same as changing a will. For if God were to change His will then He would not be immutable.[65] But how are we to think of God's willing different effects within the

[64] Helm, *Eternal God*, 69. In another place, Helm argues that Augustine viewed creation as "a timeless act in which the creation of all things and events is brought about as a whole." See Helm, *Faith and Understanding*, 89.

[65] Ibid. Helm makes the point that the temporal development of the universe is God's sustaining the created order. But what Helm seems to be saying here is that there really is no difference between God's creating and God's sustaining of the temporal universe. God's "producing" is the production of the entire space-time universe, with all of the temporal events included. But such a view as the one argued here by Helm rests on the B-theory of time, which Helm accepts. Briefly, the B-theory of time states that there are no true changes within the universe. All temporal becoming is merely mind-dependent. For the defender of the B-theory of time the entire space-time universe exists as a four dimensional space-time solid. All events within the four dimensional space-time universe exist as "earlier than" and "later than" temporal relations. Helm realizes that if the universe were such that an A-theory time were true, i.e., that the universe has temporal becoming, then for God to sustain each event as they pass in and out of existence, then God would by temporal . See Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 58. For discussions on the A and B theories of time see J. M. McT. E. McTaggart "Time" in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter Van

universe? Could God's willing different effects within the space-time universe even be possible? Helm believes so:

> The correct way to think of God's eternally willing something in time is to think of one eternal act of will with numerous temporally scattered effects. As an analogy, we may think of a person's action in setting the timer for her central heating system. This is (we may suppose) one action, analogous to God's eternal willing. But this one action has numerous temporally scattered effects, analogous to the effects in time of God's one eternal act of willing; as a result of the one act, the system fires at 7:00 a.m., goes off at 12:00 noon, fires again at 2:00p.m., goes off again at 10:30 p.m. day after day. The basic point is: there can be one decision to bring about different effects at different times. This decision may be in time, as in our example, but it may also be timeless. Aquinas put the point well: 'Note that to change your will is one matter, and to will a change in some thing is another. While remaining constant, a person can will this to happen now and the contrary to happen afterwards. His will, however, would change were he to begin to will what he had not willed before, or cease to will what he had willed before.'[66]

Thus God does not perform individual acts in response to His creatures. It is better to think of God's intentions and His responses to His creatures as somehow "built in" to the temporal order.[67] Helm explains:

> . . . it is consistent to suppose that not only can a timelessly eternal God will things in time without changing his will; he may also eternally will his own reactions in time to some human action. Suppose that God eternally knows that I will perform some particular action. Knowing this, he eternally decrees to bring about some action in the world as a response to my action. Thus God may eternally will both the burning bush and his temporally subsequent utterances to Moses, eternally knowing that Moses' attention will be attracted by the burning bush. These are logically distinct elements, but not temporally distinct elements, of God's one eternal decree.[68]

The objection could be raised: "If God's will is eternal and unchanging, then God could never decide to create anything." For instance, John Feinberg raises the following

---

Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 67; Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 4 & 15-16; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 115-216; Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 82-121.

[66] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 53.

[67] Ibid. 54. For a similar argument see Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 302.

[68] Paul Helm, "Is God Bound by Time?" in *God Under Fire*, eds. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 133.

objection:

> Suppose we conclude that, as omniscient, God does not deliberate. Suppose we add that God has always known everything, so he has always known exactly what he and anyone else would do. If so, then it seems that neither now nor ever in God's life has he deliberated or even decided what he would. He hasn't needed to do so, because he has always known what would happen. But if this is so…how can we square the idea that God has never deliberated and made a decision with biblical passages that speak of God doing all things according to the counsel of His will (e.g., Eph. 1:11)?[69]

The problem with this kind of argument, claims Helm, is how we ought to define "choice" or "decision." When we think of choice, we often think in terms of temporal causality. But why must all choices be temporal and causal affairs? Helm believes that creation can be a contingent choice and yet, an eternal and unchanging choice. God's choice to create was not a choice in time; rather, it was a logical or conceptual choice. All that is necessary for God to have a choice is an alternative to His choice, the power to will His choice, and a reason to will that choice over the alternatives. According to Helm, God's deciding to create *A* consists of an eternal contemplation of alternative possibilities and an eternal rejection of those other possibilities.[70]

Divine Timelessness and Omniscience

Given that God is timelessly eternal and strongly immutable; could such a being be omniscient?[71] There have been two basic objections raised against the compatibility of

---

[69] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 313.

[70] Helm, *Eternal God*, 178.

[71] Minimally, divine omniscience means that God knows everything. Omniscience has also been taken to mean that God knows:

(1) all true propositions
(2) true propositions and the truth and falsity of all true propositions
(3) everything that can be known

But is any one of these options (or a combination of the above options) suitable for defining divine omniscience? As John Feinberg points out, there are several problems surrounding divine omniscience. "Those problems suggest either that 1) there is something that the Judaeo-Christian God does not or cannot

divine timelessness and omniscience. The first objection states that an omniscient God, if He is timeless and immutable, could not know what is happening in the world. If God is unaware of what is taking place in the world, then, God is not omniscient. On the other hand, if God is omniscient, knowing what is "now" taking place in the world, He could not be immutable.[72] Consider the following propositions:

(1) A perfect being is not subject to change
(2) A perfect being knows everything
(3) A being that knows everything always knows what time it is.
(4) A being that always knows what time it is subject to change
(5) *Therefore a* perfect being is subject to change
(6) *Therefore a* perfect being is not a perfect being
(7) There is no perfect being[73]

It seems that a strongly immutable and timeless God could not know "now" what is going on in the universe.[74] We can think of God existing timelessly, tenselessly knowing that there exists a universe which unfolds, and in such a way that it includes a succession of events. He knows that on September 11, 2001, a plane crashes into the World Trade Center. He also knows that Smith worries at 10:00 A.M. EST, September 11, 2001, because his relative works on the thirtieth floor of the World Trade Center. We can also say that God knows tenselessly that on November 6, 2012 the first woman is elected president of the United States. Again, God knows that at 1:33 P.M. EST on May 2, 2008,

---

know, or that 2) God's intellect does not function the way we might expect an omniscient being's intellect to operate." See John Feinberg, *No One Like* Him (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 305.

[72] Paul Helm, "Timeless and Foreknowledge," in *Mind*, New Series, v. 84, n. 336. (Oct., 1975), 520.

[73] This argument is adapted from Norman Kretzmann's article "Omniscience and Immutability" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, v. 63 n. 14 (Jul. 14. 1966), 409-421.

[74] Arthur Prior rejects the eternalist position because he thinks all that a timeless being could know are tenseless truths. He gives the example of knowing that Manchester's 1960 final exams are "now over." To say that something occurs 'now' indicates that it did not happen several years ago or just the other day. According to Prior, it would be impossible, if God is timeless, for a person to ask "what God knows now" or what God "knew yesterday." All he could reply with is 'Nothing.' [See Arthur N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," in *Papers on Time and Tense* (New York: Oxford Press, 1968), 29].

Ronnie sips on a cup of coffee. Each event occurs at different times. As temporal beings, we can see a temporal succession of past, present and future. We know that the World Trade Center attack was a past event, while as the election of 2012 is yet a future event. Furthermore, Ronnie sipping his coffee is an event that is "now" taking place, and, by our understanding, it is present. We also know that, if one accepts an A theory of time, the past is no more and that future has not yet come into existence. [75] A timeless being cannot make such distinctions as past, present and future, i.e., at least in the same way that we can make those distinctions. A timeless being could know logically that Event e*'* comes before Event e'' and that Event *e'''* comes after both *e'* and *e''*.[76] However, it does not seem that a timeless God could know tensed facts as such.

Helm offers two responses to the above objection. First, for every "temporal-indexical equivalent," says Helm, a timeless person could know equivalent "non-indexical expressions."[77] Helm explains:

> One response—if it may be called that—is simply to concede the point and give up strict omniscience. One might concede the strict point of metaphysics but claim that God may nevertheless know sufficiently to enable him infallibly to deduce the occurrence of all true indexical expressions about time, expressions using words such as *now*, *then*, *yesterday*, *tomorrow*. The occurrences of such expressions in utterances are, after all, events that God, in virtue of his vast knowledge, must know. He does not know that 1999 is now for him, because it isn't. But he knows all the times when each of us make true utterances such as "It is now . . ." and he knows that whenever in 1999 we say "It is now 1999" we are speaking the truth. So God can know that "It is now 1999" is true for us whenever in that year it is

[75] Briefly, the A-theory of time states that time is dynamic and changing. The past and the present are quite different ontological than the future. The future has not yet come into existence, while the past no longer exists. All that truly exists is the present. This view recognizes that temporal becoming is a real aspect of the space-time universe, and not merely mind dependent. See McTaggart, "Time," p. 67; Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 4; Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 3-6.

[76] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity", 40.

[77] Ibid., 77. "Temporal-indexical expressions" refers to expressions such as "now", "yesterday" and "tomorrow".

> uttered, and he knows when it is uttered, for he knows that it is uttered at some particular time during 1999.[78]

Take the following propositions:

> (1) It is raining on 30 July 1987.
> (2) Someone living on 30 July 1987 can, and does, utter the true expression 'It is raining now'.[79]

Obviously, if God is timeless, then He could not know that "it is now raining"; nevertheless, given that an omniscient being knows all facts, he can come to know indirectly that "it is now raining" based on His knowledge that "it rains on 30 July 1987" and that someone living on 30 July 1987 utters "it is now raining."

The second response Helm provides to the above objection is that the temporalist suffers from the same problem as the eternalist, i.e., that there are some propositions that a temporal God cannot know.

> . . . one may point out that . . . the temporalist is in a parallel position with respect to the issue. For if God is in time, then there are also types of propositions that such a temporal God cannot know—propositions that express knowledge of the universe from the perspective of timeless eternity.[80]

Temporality and atemporality, says Helm, are restricted positions. A temporal being cannot know what it is like to exist outside of time. Similarly, Helm argues that an omniscient being could not know what it is like to share the "me-ness" of another person. Each person, says Helm, has his or her own "me-ness." Only an individual can experience individual "me-ness." Only Smith can know that "I, Smith, am talking on the phone." Jones can know that Smith is talking on the phone, but Jones cannot know in the same way that Smith knows he is talking on the phone. There is only a certain "me-ness"

---

[78] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 41.

[79] Helm, *Eternal God*, 80.

[80] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," 41.

that Smith can know apart from anyone else knowing it. Just as Jones cannot know Smith's "me-ness", neither could God know Jones' or Smith's or any other person's "me-ness." An individual's "me-ness" is a restricted position that only that person shares with himself. Thus, if God is temporal then there are propositions that a temporal, omniscient God cannot know.[81]

The second objection brought against the compatibility of divine timelessness and omniscience is based on God's omniscience of the future and human libertarian freewill. Several philosophers have suggested that, given human libertarian freewill,[82] an omniscient God could not know future contingents.[83] Richard Swinburne argues that since God can know only true propositions, He could not know future propositions concerning the free actions of human beings, because these propositions are neither true nor false. Future propositions performed by free agents become true only when the free

[81] Ibid.

[82] There are at least four ways of understanding the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom: determinism, compatibilism, an antinomy, and indeterminism. Determinism is the view that given a set of prior circumstances and conditions, the outcome of a certain event or action could not have ceased to come about. While a human agent might make a choice, the choice made could not have happened differently. *Contra* determinism, indeterminism (also known as libertarianism or libertarian free will) states that despite the prior circumstances of an event, the outcome could have come about differently. In other words, an agent could have freely chosen, without any "sufficient" conditions or causes, to do other than she did. Compatibilism, on the other hand, argues that there is no inherent contradiction between determinism and free will. The agent chooses to do a certain action despite that the action was causally determined. Lastly, an antinomy view of sovereignty and human freedom asserts that the contradiction between the two equal conclusions is only apparent. See William Hasker, *Metaphysics Constructing a World View*, ed. C. Stephen Evens (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 32-33; Paul Helm, *Providence*, 43, 55-68; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 18-36.)

[83] "Openness Theology" refers to a position held by a certain group of Christian theists who reject that God could know future counterfactuals. God or any other person could not know future free actions because those actions have not yet occurred. According to William Hasker, future actions are neither true nor false. If God can only know what is either true or false or those things which are logical possible for Him to know, then He could not know the future. Central to the Openness position is human libertarian freewill. If an agent truly has libertarian free will, that is, to either freely choose or refrain from a particular action, then not even God could know what choice that individual might choose. [See William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 136-137.

agent has performed the action.[84] Further, Swinburne maintains that God limits His own knowledge of the future to preserve both His freedom and creaturely freedom.

> In choosing to preserve his own freedom (and to give others freedom), he (that is, God) limits his own knowledge of what is to come. He continually limits himself in this way by not curtailing his or men's future freedom. As regards men, their choices are much influenced by circumstances and this makes it possible for a being who knows all the circumstances to predict human behavior correctly most of the time, but always with the possibility that men may falsify those predictions.[85]

According to Helm, the above position limits God, not only in His omniscience, but also in His omnipotence. If God is omniscient in the sense that Swinburne and Open Theism proposes, then it seems that God will have plans that are thwarted or that He will not be able to accomplish all that He sets out to accomplish. Helm agrees that if humans are indeterministically free, then God could not know the future of truly free (in the libertarian's sense) creatures. However, if God is omniscient in the way promoted by Swinburne and Openness Theism, then there is a tradeoff:

> There will, in the life of God, necessarily be some frustration as those ends that he wishes to secure cannot be achieved, or must be achieved by a different route. God will have many true beliefs about the future; he will be highly informed and expert, but his knowledge will

[84] Swinburne, Coherence, 174. Swinburne and others argue that an individual could not know the truth of future tense statements because those statements are neither true nor false, but, why accept this? The burden of proof is on those who deny that God could know the truth value of future tense statements. Unless there is good reason to accept this, then it is possible that God knows future tense statements. An objector may argue that future tense statements are neither true nor false because they do not exist. True statements, they say, only correspond with reality. According to William Lane Craig, the objector misunderstands the correspondence theory of truth. Something is true *iff* "what it states to be the case really is the case." (William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 56.) Craig argues that truth as correspondence does not require the event to exist in order for it to be true. This is only the case for present tense events. For example, the statement "Bob listens to music" is true only if Bob presently listens to music. Now let us consider the future statement "Smith will eat peanuts on June 5th, 2020." Now this statement is true *iff.* Smith eats peanuts on June 5th, 2020. Perhaps the friend of Open Theism may argue that the possibilities for future contingents are infinitely great and would be difficult for any individual to know all the possibilities. But why could not an all knowing God know all possibilities that exist. It is difficult to extrapolate from our limited experience to what a divine being might know, and if we are to take Scripture *prima facie*, then we must say that an omniscient Being must know the future. An objector may argue that, because God knows what happens in the future, one must accept fate. This argument, however, is a *non sequitur*, because there is a distinction between what "will" happen and what "must" happen. See Craig, *The Only*, 55-57.

[85] Swinburne, *Coherence,* 176.

> be like your knowledge and mine – it will be fallible. Alternatively, infallibility will be purchased at the expense of ignorance.[86]

While the Swinburnian and Openness view allow for indeterministically free creatures, it debilitates God's sovereignty and omnipotence. Thus, for Helm, a strong omnipotence "entails" and "requires" a strong omniscience,[87] and only a timeless and strongly immutable God could preserve a strong omniscience.[88]

Helm recognizes that Swinburne's notion of omniscience finds support in scripture. For instance, there are places in scripture which indicate that God changes His plans or actions in response to human intercession or repentance. Seemingly then:

> . . . there are, in effect, two types of scriptural data. One type indicates that God's knowledge is unqualified. The other type of data represents God as learning, as forgetting, as changing his mind, as being surprised, and the like. What, then, ought we to conclude? What part do such data play in an account of divine providence which is not only coherent in itself but in accordance with all the data of Scripture?[89]

How is it that scripture presents two, seemingly contradictory, portraits of God's knowledge? The answer to this apparent contradiction is found in John Calvin's notion of "accommodation." But before moving on to Helm's use of accommodation, it would be beneficial to examine two hermeneutical approaches to the seemingly contradictory scriptural data.

There are two ways to approach the data of scripture, says Helm. First, one could interpret the language of scripture in such a way that those passages which speak of God's "ignorance" or "powerlessness" take precedent over those passages which speak of God's omniscience or power. Instead, when the Bible speaks of God's omniscience and

---

[86] Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 54.

[87] Helm, "God Does Not Take Risk," 232.

[88] Helm, *Eternal God*, 94.

[89] Helm, *The Providence of God*, 47.

power, these statements should be taken hyperbolically. The alternative "hermeneutical position" is to interpret the statements which speak of God as limited, e.g., as in ignorant or changing His mind, in light those passages which speak of God as immutable or maximal in His knowledge and power. Helm concludes that this later method should take precedent and that any statements which are anthropomorphic or in the "weaker sense" should be interpreted by those statements which exhibit the "extent and intensity of God's knowledge, power, and goodness."[90]

Now by accommodation, Helm means "the need for God to address men and women in terms that they can understand and respond to."[91] Scripture's uses of anthropomorphisms is not a humanly attempt to speak of the "inexpressible"; rather, it is "one of the ways in which God graciously condescends to his creatures." [92] Thus for Calvin, says Helm, not only is scripture's use the anthropomorphisms and such language "an act of accommodation" but it is also "an act of grace."[93] Therefore, scripture portrays God:

> . . . in anthropomorphic ways, and his action and character are also likened to non-human animals and to inanimate things. The reason for such portrayals is both pragmatic and logical: the need to represent God to human beings in ways which do not (as Calvin would have put it) pander to the natural, sinful torpor and sluggishness of the human mind; and also the need for God to reveal himself in such a way as to make dialogue possible between himself and his human creatures.[94]

Thus, it is necessary for believers to adopt a hermeneutical approach to scripture where it recognizes anthropomorphic language for what it is and from there interpret such

---

[90] Ibid., 52.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 53-54

language in view of those passages and scriptural data which speak of God in His maximal qualities.

Conclusion

Is Helm's defense of the classical medieval notion of divine timelessness coherent? Moreover, do the doctrines of divine timelessness and strong immutability cohere with other core doctrines of the Christian faith? For now, we shall only examine the eternalist argument from divine fullness. Chapter two will pick up on our discussion of strong immutability. Further, chapter two will consider two objections to divine timeless and strong immutability based on the doctrines of creation and incarnation.

Much of Helm's discussion on divine timelessness depends on two key concepts: the intuition of divine fullness and a strong immutability. There are two reasons eternalists hold to the notion of divine fullness. First, it preserves the Judeo-Christian teaching that God is a transcendent and free being. He is uncreated and has always existed. God does not depend on anything for His existence, nor is He imposed on by anything outside of Himself. Rather, everything that exists depends on Him for its existence. Second, divine fullness preserves God's perfection. All theists believe that God is a perfect being. But in contrast to the Process view, which holds that the divine being can surpass Himself,[95] the doctrine of divine fullness teaches that God does not increase or decrease in His perfection, since He is already perfect. Despite the fact that divine fullness preserves God's transcendence and perfection, is there reason to reject such a notion? In what follows, two possible objections to the notion of divine fullness will be considered.

[95] See Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Books, 1967), 19.

One possible objection to divine fullness is that, despite the fact God looses the past and that it is no longer present to Him, there is no reason to doubt that time exists for God. Nicholas Wolterstorff asserts that there is a

> . . . feeling, deep-seated in much of human culture, that the flowing of events into an irrecoverable and unchangeable past is a matter for deep regret. Our bright actions and shining moments do not long endure. The gnawing tooth of time bites all. And our evil deeds can never be undone….Of course, the philosopher is inclined to distinguish the mere fact of temporality from the actual pattern of the events in history and to argue that regrets about the latter should not slosh over into regrets about the former. The philosopher is right. The regrettableness of what transpires in time is not good ground for regretting that there is a time….Regrets over the pervasive pattern of what transpires within time have led whole societies to place the divine outside of time –freed from the "bondage" of temporality.[96]

But the eternalist may not be satisfied with Wolterstorff's response.

A second objection to the notion of divine fullness is to argue that God has perfect recall of all past experiences. God is not a temporal being in the same way that we are temporal. Our humanly knowledge is limited by our temporal-spatial world and often we forget the past. Unlike our human memory, God knows things as perfectly and vividly as they occurred, thus dulling "time's tooth."[97] William Lane Craig explains:

> When we recall that God is perfectly omniscient and so forgets absolutely nothing of the past and knows everything about the future, then time's tooth is considerably dulled for Him. His past experiences do not fade as ours do, and He has perfect recall of what He has undergone. To be sure, the past itself is gone (given a tensed or dynamic view of time0, but His experience of the past remains as vivid as ever.[98]

However, Helm finds this kind of objection inadequate.

> Let us suppose that God's recall is sharp and vivid and total – beyond anything that we experience in our rememberings. The main thing is that though God may infallibly and vividly remember his past, those bits of his life that he remembers are over. One cannot, by definition, remember what is not past; and what is past is not present. God may "relive" them through memory, but he cannot, literally, live them again. Nor would a divine

---

[96] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78.

[97] Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 72.

[98] Ibid.,

> analogue of time travel be of any more help, for the reason already given. The uniqueness of the present moment is forever lost when the moment becomes past.[99]

Despite the above objections, the argument from divine fullness seems to be a strong argument in favor of divine timelessness. Nevertheless, in order for God to have the whole existence at once, as the argument from divine fullness proposes, then God would need to be strongly immutable. [100] For now, we must judge that Helm's view of divine timelessness is coherent; however, the doctrine of divine timelessness ultimately depends on a strong immutability. In what follows, we shall examine the doctrine of divine immutability.

[99] Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity", 30.

[100] One could argue this on the basis that God is simple.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVINE IMMUTABILITY, CREATION AND INCARNATION

As was previously demonstrated, strong immutability and timelessness entail one another. Eternalists understand immutability in the strongest sense. Not only is God changeless, it is not even possible for Him to change. But does such an understanding come from scripture's teaching on the doctrine? In this chapter, we seek to examine the doctrine of immutability in light of scripture and by examining some modern treatments of the doctrine. What will be shown is that, while scripture affirms the doctrine of immutability, the interpretation of immutability by eternalism should be rejected. Instead, the Bible teaches that God is immutable in the sense that He does not change in His essence, character, plan or purposes. Further, given a modified interpretation of the doctrine of immutability, two objections will be raised against the doctrine of divine timelessness. The first objection will examine the doctrine of creation. If God creates and sustains the temporal universe, then it would seem that God is temporal. But as will be demonstrated, this objection depends on one's view of the nature of time. If one holds to the B-theory of time, then the doctrines of timelessness and immutability are preserved. However, if the A-theory of time is true, then it would seem that God is somehow temporal by virtue of His sustaining creation. The second objection that will be raised examines the incarnation. The traditional Christian doctrine of the incarnation, i.e., that God the Son assumed flesh and dwelt among us, seemingly contradicts the notion that God is timelessly eternal. If Christ entered into our space-time realm, then it would seem

that in order for Him to do such an act as become incarnate, He would need to be in some sense temporal.

The Doctrine of Immutability

The doctrine of divine immutability has come under recent attack by Process theology and by proponents of the Openness of God. Both Process theologians and Openness proponents have taken classical theology's view of immutability to mean that God is a static being. Concerning the classical conception of immutability, John Cobb and David Ray Griffin claim:

> The concept derives from the Greeks, who maintained that "perfection" entailed compete "immutability," or lack of change. The notion of "impassability" stressed that deity may be completely unaffected by any other reality and must lack all passion or emotional response. The notion that deity is the "Absolute" has meant that God is not really related to the world. The world is really related to God, in that the relation to God is constitutive of the world—an adequate description of the world requires reference to its dependence on God—but even the fact that there is a world is not constitutive of the reality of God. God is wholly independent of the world: the God-world relation is purely external to God. These three terms—unchangeable, passionless, and absolute—finally say the same thing, that the world contributes nothing to God, and that God's influence upon the world is in no way conditioned by divine responsiveness to unforeseen, self-determining activities of us worldly beings. Process theology denies the existence of this God.[1]

Similarly Clark Pinnock states that,

> . . . . the tradition has taken immutability far in the direction of immobility and inertness. Some have claimed that God is wholly actual and not at all potential and thus cannot change in any way. They have equated the biblical idea of faithfulness with the Greek idea that requires any changes related to God to occur only on the human side.[2]

Despite the above objections, how should the Christian theist construe the doctrine of divine immutability? Should Christian theism accept the notion of strong immutability found in eternalism or should the doctrine of immutability be rejected altogether? Below

---

[1] John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology*: *An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 8.

[2] Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 117.

we shall examine the biblical basis for the doctrine of divine immutability, followed by a re-examination of the doctrine.

Biblical Basis for Divine Immutability

While the word immutability never appears in scripture, the concept, nevertheless, is implied by many verses. Scripture teaches that God does not change in His divine nature and character. In Psalm 102:25-27, the psalmist declares "Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. 'But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.'" Here the psalmist affirms that while all that God has created will change, yet He will "endure." His existence is forever. Further, Scripture confirms that God does not change in certain attributes, e.g., His loving kindness (Ps 103:17) and power (Rom 1:20). Similarly, when contrasting our corruptness with God's incorruptibility, James reminds His readers that "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17). God is neither fickle, as we are, nor can He become something He is not. The prophet Malachi records, "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal 3:6). In 1 John 1:5, the apostle claims that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness." God is perfectly holy. He cannot cease being so. Further, Paul reminds Timothy that, even when we are "faithless," God "remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim 2:13). Along the lines of God's faithfulness, God always fulfills His promises (2 Cor 1:20).

Scripture also affirms that God does not change in His divine plan or will. For instance, we read in Ps 33:11 that "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation" (See also Prov 19:21). Similarly, God does not change in His purposes (Isa 14:24; 46:9-10; Heb 6:17).

Thus from the above passages it is clear that scripture affirms God's immutability. God is immutable in His divine nature and attributes as well as in character. In addition, God's life is such that it endures and is incorruptible. Further, God does not change in His divine plan, decree or purposes. Now that we have observed the scriptural basis, let us re-examine the doctrine of immutability in light of some recent theological formulations of the doctrine.

A Re-examination of the Doctrine of Divine Immutability

As was demonstrated earlier, for eternalism, the doctrine of strong immutability is intricately linked to the doctrine of divine timelessness. Paul Helm asserts that there is:

> . . . . a conceptual connection between divine immutability and divine eternity in that an individual who is immutable in the strong sense must be eternal, and vice versa. It follows in turn that divine timeless eternity is the conceptual link between immutability (in the strong sense) and omniscience. Only a timeless God can be both strongly immutable and omniscient.[3]

If T stands for "timeless" and S for "strongly immutable," then we can state the eternalist proposition in the following way:

(x) (Tx → Sx); $_{\text{def.}}$ For any x, if x is T, then x is S

Following Augustine *et al.*, Helm proposes that only a God immutable in the strongest

[3] Helm, *Eternal God*, 94.

sense could perform those acts attributed to Him by scripture. Nothing about God changes or could change. Such a Being could not even experience Cambridge changes.[4]

Part of the motivation for the doctrine of strong immutability, as found in eternalism, is God's perfection. This is particularly recognized in Helm's treatment of divine fullness. There is an underlying assumption that all change is either for the better or worse. God is both necessary and the greatest being. If God is already the greatest being then how can he change for the better? Otherwise He would become more and more perfect. But God cannot grow in perfection: He is already perfect. If God changes for the worse, then He would no longer be God, since such a change would imply that God is no longer perfect. Hence for eternalism any change would be a change in value. But as Thomas Morris points out:

> . . . . why think that all possible changes are changes of value? Can't there be value-neutral changes? As I write this sentence I change from forming one letter to forming the next, but I see no reason to think that such changes necessitate an increase or a decrease in my intrinsic value or metaphysical stature at all. And if there are value-neutral changes, it will not follow from the fact that God cannot change for the better or for the worse that God cannot change at all. So his perfection does not clearly motivate a doctrine of absolute immutability after all.[5]

Is there reason to think that God changes in a "value-neutral" sense? In order to answer this question, it will help to clarify the biblical doctrine of immutability by examining different ways Christian theists construe the doctrine. Here Richard Swinburne, Jay Richards and Bruce Ware provide helpful insight with regard to the doctrine of immutability.

---

[4] We have been using "strong" to describe the kind of immutability espoused by eternalism, since this is the term that Helm uses to delineate His own view. A better way of speaking about the eternalist's conception of immutability is to say that God is "absolutely" immutable. By absolute immutability, one means that there is no sense in which God changes, nor could He ever change.

[5] Morris, 127.

Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne distinguishes between a "weak" and "strong" sense of immutability. According to Swinburne,

> [i]n the weaker way to say of a person that he is immutable is simply to say that he cannot change in character. To say of a free and omniscient creator that he is immutable is simply to say that, while he continues to exist, necessarily he remains fixed in his character. . . . According to traditional theism God is essentially perfectly free and omniscient, and so it follows that he will not change in character.[6]

The stronger way of speaking about immutability implies that God "cannot change at *all*."[7] Swinburne rejects the stronger sense of immutability, because such a notion means that "from all eternity" God's intentions are fixed. God would be a "lifeless thing; not a person who reacts to men with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening because he chooses to there and then."[8] Swinburne's contribution has helped pinpoint different ways in which the doctrine of immutability can be interpreted. But if we are to accept the weaker sense only, as Swinburne does, then we are recognizing that God is immutable in His character, only. Scripture affirms that God is immutable in His character, but it also affirms that God is immutable in His nature and attributes, purposes, plan and decree. Thus merely distinguishing between a "weaker" and "stronger" sense of immutability is not enough.

Jay Richards

Jay Richards also sets forth a re-examination of the doctrine of divine immutability in view of what he calls "theological essentialism," which employs the use of modal logic and possible worlds. By "essentialism" Richards means: "the thesis *that*

---

[6] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, reprint ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 212.

[7] Ibid., 214,

[8] Ibid.

persons, objects and entities have some of their properties necessarily or essentially, and others accidentally or contingently."[9] Now when speaking of "properties," Richards has in mind "states of affairs concerning entities of different types: as truths or facts about such entities."[10] Thus, theological essentialism is the conception that God has certain properties essentially and contingently.

In Richards' view, God's having contingent properties entails "all those properties that include contingent states of affairs, such as those concerned with creation."[11] This also includes God's relations to creation. For example, *God's sustaining the universe* or *God's hearing Smith's prayers* are contingent states of affairs. It could have been the case that God created a different world in which different states of affairs obtained or that God ceased from creating any world. Contingent properties are not essential for God to have and would not have obtained in every possible world. Nevertheless, the contingency of the world and God's relations to it are grounded in God's perfect freedom.

On the other hand, essential properties are those properties that God exhibits in every possible world. Among essential properties are God's perfections, which belong to God's essence. Since God exists necessarily in every possible world, then so, too, do God's perfections. Yet, no contingent properties belong to God's essence, "since an essence is a set of all essential properties or at least includes that set."[12]

But how does theological essentialism translate into our discussion on divine immutability? According to Richards, "we can consider the possibilities that God is

---

[9] Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 64.

[10] Ibid., 91.

[11] Ibid., 99.

[12] Ibid., 99.

immutable in every respect, in some respects or in no respect."[13] If we take seriously Scripture's testimony of the doctrine of divine immutability, then the last option should be rejected. But how should one take God's immutability in "every respect"? Richards finds this understanding of immutability implausible. For instance, when taking into consideration such Christian doctrines as creation and the incarnation, there remains an element of contingency in both of these doctrines. It would seem that both *God's creating the world* and *God the Son's becoming incarnate* are non-essential properties to God.[14] While both are important to God and ought not to be considered trivial, they are, nevertheless, contingent. For God, in His perfect freedom, did not have to create, nor through the Son, become incarnate; rather they result from God's free choice to create and to become incarnate.

To say that God has contingent properties is to say that God changes, at least in respect to His now having a property that He did not have before, e.g., the relation of now sustaining the universe. Again, having this property does not imply that God changes in His essence. In addition to God's having contingent properties, there seems to be variations in God's knowledge.

> Think, for example of some variations in knowledge. For instance, while it is better for God to know everything that he can know than to lack some knowledge relevant to his purview, is it better to know the truth that (1) John Brown runs at *t* than that (2) John Brown does not run at *t*? It is hard to see how. What is important is to know which of these propositions is true, rather than to believe one falsely. And if (1) is true in some possible worlds and (2) is true in others, it would hardly be a deficiency for God's knowledge to change depending on which state of affairs obtains. In fact, the truth is just the opposite. It is surely better to know what is the case than to be immune to change in knowledge. So every type of change does not violate the PP [Principal of Perfection].[15]

---

[13] Ibid., 197.

[14] Richards uses the word "properties" loosely and does not mean it in the way that the word is traditionally used.

[15] Ibid., 201.

God's having variations in His knowledge does not entail a deficiency in perfection; rather, as Richards points out, it is better for God to know what "is the case," than for God to experience no change in His knowledge. That God has these contingent properties stems from God's freedom. Richards explains:

> The fact that some of God's properties may vary seems to follow straightforwardly from the fact that God exercises libertarian freedom in choosing to create the world. If God had to create the world, then God's creative activity was not free. In contrast, recognizing that God could have done otherwise captures the fact that God was free in creating, the graciousness of his choice to do so and the contingency of the world he has created.[16]

Richards thinks that it would be an error "to deny that choice was an element of God's creative freedom."[17]

This leaves Richards, then, with the last option, i.e., that God is immutable in "some respect." Richards rejects the notion that God is immutable in His character and faithfulness only. Theologians and philosophers, says Richards, appeal to this understanding of immutability based on the text of Scripture. However, such a conception of divine immutability seems inadequate, if left by itself. Richards argues:

> If God is perfect, then surely God is essentially reliable and steadfast, since it is surely better to be reliable and steadfast in all possible worlds than in only some. So grounding God's reliability and unchangeableness in his essence makes sense. . . . Moreover, why restrict God's immutability only to his character, that is, to his moral qualities? After all, commitment to divine perfection and aseity seem to require immutability (i.e., essentiality) of God's other perfections as well. If God's essence could change (ignoring for the moment the fact that this would render his essence nonessential), then obviously enough, it could be possible that he lack some or all of his essential properties, including his perfections. But then God might lack a perfection *p*, which would obviously be worse than if he possessed perfection *p* essentially. So whatever perfection God does in fact possess, such as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, freedom and faithfulness, he must possess immutably. That is, if God is perfect with respect to his positive attributes, then he is immutable with respect to those attributes. God has certain essential properties by virtue of

[16] Ibid., 201-202.

[17] Ibid., 202.

> being perfect; so he cannot change in those respects. This much is not only compatible with but also entailed by an essentialism committed to central Christian themes.[18]

Not only is God's essence immutable, says Richards, but it is God's immutability that "distinguishes God's essential properties from his accidental ones."[19] So, rather than rejecting immutability, the essentialist only rejects the claim that God can change in no sense.

Richards has contributed to our discussion on the doctrine of divine immutability by distinguishing between God's essential and accidental properties.[20] As Richards rightly acknowledges, if there is a distinction between God's essential and accidental properties, then no accidental properties could properly be said to be part of God's essence. Rather, only those properties, e.g., His divine perfections, are essential to God and thus belong to God's unchanging essence, that is, God would have these essential properties in every possible world. Accidental properties, on the other hand, such as *God's creating the world*, are contingent and depend on God's unchanging essence. But how are we to construe these accidental properties in view of God's own self-disclosure? What follows will help to elucidate the kinds of changes that could be said of God.

Bruce Ware

Bruce Ware furthers our attempt to distinguish between senses of God's immutability. According to Ware, the notion of "absolute immutability" should be rejected, since such a view "not only violates . . . .valid senses to conceive of God's ability to change, but it also blurs certain distinctions that are called for by Scripture in

[18] Ibid. 198-199.

[19] Ibid., 199.

[20] Again, by properties, Richards means "state of affairs".

relation to his ability to change."[21] Ware distinguishes between God's "ontological immutability" and God's "ethical immutability." [22] First, by ontologically immutable, Ware means that God does not change "in the supreme excellence of his intrinsic nature", i.e., He is "constant" in His revealed "self-sameness."[23] God's ontological immutability is a "first-order conception" of immutability by which any other sense of immutability would fall.[24] Following the tradition of the Church, Ware affirms that God changes neither for better nor for worse, since,

> [e]ither course of change is precluded by his being eternally self-sufficient. God cannot gain any value, since he eternally encompasses all such value in his own intrinsic being. And God certainly does not lose any value in his creation of lesser reality, since Scripture's affirmation that God does not change refers fundamentally, then, to his ontological immutability, to the changelessness of who he ever is as God.[25]

Thus God is ontologically immutable in His supreme divine nature and divine attributes. He does not vary in His existence; rather, He is as He has always been.

Second, when Ware speaks of God's ethical immutability, he means that God is faithful and reliable in His "unconditional promises" and "moral obligations."[26] Ethical immutability, which is a "second-order" sense of immutability, "presupposes (1) God's ontological changelessness, (2) the existence of a contingent and temporal moral order, and (3) the free decision of God to pledge himself to his creatures in certain ways that

---

[21] Bruce Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," in the *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Dec. 1986), 434.

[22]Ibid. 434, 436.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 435.

[26] Ibid., 436.

accord with his intrinsic nature."[27] God's promises and commitments toward his creatures were "freely-determined" and were not "necessary." He neither had to create the temporal world, consisting of a moral order, nor did He have to pledge Himself to such commitments or promises; rather, God freely chose to bind Himself to such promises and commitments, which are "freely self-imposed and self-determined."[28]

One important feature brought out by Ware's emphasis on God's ethical immutability is the notion that it is grounded in God's ontological immutability. It is God's ontological immutability which makes it possible for God to carry out His promises and commitments.[29] This leads Ware to his next point.

While Scripture affirms God's "onto-ethical immutability," it also affirms God's "relational mutability," i.e., the fact that God changes in his relationships toward His creatures.[30] Scripture, says Ware, "speaks about the active intimate and concerned involvement of God with His creation, an involvement that includes innumerable changes on the part of God and on the part of His creatures."[31] Scripture makes abundantly clear that God changes in His actions and responses toward His creatures. For instance, God changes from judgment and wrath to forgiveness and mercy toward a sinner who repents or, as in the case of God's covenant people, Israel, God changes from blessing to cursing. God's changing in His relationships toward His creatures does not entail that God

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 437.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 438.

[31] Ibid.

that God lacks any "negative emotions," such as divine "anger or wrath." Ware affirms the first sense of impassibility, while he rejects the second sense. He concludes that while God's emotions are not like our own, nonetheless, we should affirm Scripture's use of such emotions ascribed to God. Ware thinks the primary reason some have rejected ascribing any kind of emotion to God is due to the false conception that emotions are "a form of weakness, a limitation, a disturbance to one's inner life that resulted often to mishap or poor judgment."[35] But not all emotions are "weaknesses" or "mishaps". Emotions, when used correctly, argues Ware, "have potential for good" and can "stir up toward holiness or compassion or faithfulness."[36] Therefore, it is appropriate to attribute emotions to God, especially given the abundant evidence in Scripture. Thus, God's changing in emotions, too, is a part of God's relational mutability.

Ware's distinction between God's onto-ethical immutability and His relational mutability helps to clarify the many passages in Scripture which seem to indicate that God is immutable, on the one hand, and changing on the other. But as Ware adamantly emphasizes, God's changing in His relationships toward His creatures is grounded in His onto-ethical immutability. God always fulfills His promises. He is faithful and could not be otherwise. Much like Richards' accidental properties, God's relational acts are non-essential to God's nature, yet when God promises or commits to His creatures, God freely binds Himself to the these relationships.

---

[35] Ibid., 445.

[36] Ibid., 446.

Toward a Barthian Affirmation of the Doctrine of Divine Immutability

In this attempt to express the doctrine of divine immutable, we have sought to understand it in light of Scripture's teaching. *Contra* Process theology, the doctrine of immutability should be affirmed, yet, it seems that immutability, as found in eternalism, is taken beyond Scripture's portrayal of the doctrine. Scripture teaches that God is immutable, but it also teaches that God changes in His relationships and His actions. Thus He is the one who creates, sustains, redeems, judges, shows mercy and wrath, forgives, demonstrates patience, and loves. Perhaps a better statement of God's unchangingness could be found in something akin to Karl Barth's positive affirmation of the doctrine in His *Church Dogmatics*.

God is certainly "immutable," says Barth, but not in the sense that He is "immobile" or "motionless"; rather, God is immutable in the Biblical sense, in which, He is "the living God" possessing "mobility" and "elasticity." [37] Barth prefers to speak of God as "constant," since the word "immutable" is "suspiciously negative."[38] It is God's constancy which "differentiates" God from all else, i.e., all that is "distinct from Himself."[39] Barth points out that God's creating and sustaining "a reality distinct from Himself" is an "expression" of God's life.[40] Yet God creates out of His own perfect love, which is free, and not out of any necessity. When God becomes Lord by virtue of His creating, He does not change or alter in who He is. Rather, God is the means and "ground" of creation's life and existence, yet He is not identified with this creaturely life

[37] Ibid., 496.

[38] Ibid., 495.

[39] Ibid., 491.

[40] Ibid., 499.

and existence. God has a life and vitality of His own, independent of and free from the life that He gives to creation. Further, Barth draws attention to the fact that God has "a real history in and with the world created by Him."[41] Yet God is *the* "subject" of all History, which is preeminently demonstrated through Jesus Christ.

Barth's notion of constancy resonates with Ware's distinction between God's "onto-ethical immutability" and God's "relational mutability" and with Richards' "theological essentialism." On the one hand, like Ware and Richards, Barth recognizes that God does not increase or decrease or alter in His being or essence. He neither grows weary nor fatigued; rather, He is the self-same in His divine unchanging essence. On the other hand, Barth affirms that in whatever actions God performs, He remains constant in His being. Similar to Ware's relational mutability, God's acting and moving in the world is what Barth calls the "holy mutability of God."[42] Yet it is only through God's constancy that God can perform the kinds of actions attributed to Him by Scripture. Furthermore, God's acting and relating to His creatures or His becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ is not done out of any obligation to the creation, rather, it is out of God's free "decision" to create and to act and to become incarnate.

Conclusion

Thus, the view of immutability posited here is *a* strong sense of immutability, but not in the absolute sense found eternalism. Further, such a conception of immutability is grounded in scriptural witness, but at the same time allows for scripture's affirmation of

[41] Ibid., 502.

[42] Ibid., 496.

God's changing in His actions and relationships toward His people. Thus we conclude with Millard Erickson:

> The God we find in Scripture is not a static being as in Aristotle's God. He is rather an active, dynamic being, at work in the world. This dynamic activity, however, is stable, not unstable. His actions are in keeping with his fundamental nature, with his values, plans, and decisions . . . There is nothing to lead us to believe that God acts at any point in conflict with his nature.[43]

The God of Scripture does not change in His essence, nor does He grow or alter. He is constant in His being and active in the world.

Change, Creation and Incarnation

Now that we have examined the doctrine of immutability in view of scriptures teaching on it and in view of some recent treatments of the doctrine, we shall examine two objections to the doctrine of absolute immutability and divine timelessness.

Divine Timelessness and the Problem of Atemporal Sustaining

The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, i.e., that the universe and all things within the universe came into existence out of nothing (not-anything), is essential to the classical Christian worldview, and it finds abundant support in Scripture.[44] Creation *ex nihilo* entered into the Christian tradition through Hebraic tradition and was advocated by the Church Fathers.[45] According to John 1:2, "all things came into being" through the Word. Similarly, the Apostle Paul, when speaking of the preincarnate Son of God, tells us

---

[43] Millard Erickson, *God the Father Almighty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 112.

[44] See Gen 1:1; Ps 33:6-9; John 1:1, 3; Acts 4:24; Col 1:16; Heb 11:3.

[45] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 83-87. For a great discussion on the doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo* see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

that "by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17) Not only does God bring into existence everything within the universe through the Word, but He also sustains everything within creation. Hence, the universe is contingent and dependent on God for its existence.

According to Thomas Aquinas, "God's action, which is without pre-existing mater and is called creation, is neither a motion nor a change, properly speaking."[46] To say that God "creates", is to say that God produces or causes the whole of creation "by His intellect and will."[47] James Ross, an avid Thomist, calls this kind of causation "metaphysical causation"[48], i.e., a kind of causation that is continuous and "instantaneous." [49] A metaphysical cause includes not only the effect, but the cause itself in the effect.

> Metaphysical effects are never separated by any space-time interval from their causes as are the typical event-sequence explained by scientific law. Again, just the reverse. The metaphysical cause is "everywhere" in its effect, and its causing is coextensive spatiotemporally with the being of the effect, the way that crystal geometry is everywhere in the crystal it forms.[50]

God's producing creation is analogous to a thinker's producing a thought or to a dreamer's producing a dream. However, claims Ross, this is not to say that God is

---

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* B. 2. Chapt. 17:1

[47] *Summa Theologica*, P. 1. Q. 45. A. 2.

[48] James F. Ross, "Creation II," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 119.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 120.

somehow intrinsically a part of the thing being produced.[51] Concerning God's creating the universe, Ross explains:

> Creation is a universal force, like a light that causes things to be (visible), but which would have been unchanged had other things been caused to be (visible) instead. For God's understanding – to make some purely conceptual distinctions – the election, but not production, of things flows. God is a radiant force, present everywhere, throughout everything that actually is, even throughout the gravitational writhing of otherwise empty space (if there is any) and, therefore, throughout physical space-time itself, causing it to *be.*[52]

For both Aquinas and Ross, God's producing the universe and God's sustaining the universe seems to be one continuous eternal act. Concerning God's creation and sustaining, Aquinas says "a thing is being created and is already created at the same time."[53]

But could not the objection be raised that God's sustaining a temporal universe suggests that He is temporal, since God now stands in a causal relationship by sustaining creation? William Lane Craig explains:

> Once time begins at the moment of creation, either God becomes temporal in virtue of His real relation to the world or else He exists just as timelessly with creation as He does without it. If we choose the first alternative, then, once again, God is temporal. But what about the second alternative? Can God remain untouched by the world's temporality? It seems not. For at the first moment of time, God stands in a new relation in which He did not stand before (since there was no "before"). Even if in creating the world God undergoes no intrinsic change, He at least undergoes extrinsic change. For at the moment of creation, God comes into the relation of sustaining the universe or, at the very least, of co-existing with the universe, relations in which He did not stand before. Thus, even if it is not the case that God is temporal prior to His creation of the world, He nonetheless undergoes an extrinsic change at the moment of creation which draws Him into time in virtue of His real relation to the world.[54]

---

[51] Ibid., 120-121.

[52] Ibid., 125.

[53] *Summa Theologica*, P. 1. Q. 45. A. 2

[54] William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality" in *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, Vol. w, No. 1, 2000, 30.

Eternalists, such as Aquinas and Ross, would, however, reject the notion that God's having created the universe causes Him to undergo extrinsic change, or any kind of change for that matter. But what about God's "acting in the world" or "sustaining the world"?

Before examining the eternalist's response, it would be beneficial to probe deeper the kind of argument presented here by Craig. Is it possible for an atemporal being to sustain or act within a temporal universe without Himself becoming temporal? Part of the answer to this question depends on how one defines time. In what follows, the two main theories of time shall be examined, followed by an exposition of the above argument by William Lane Craig and Alan Padgett. After examining the Craig-Padgett argument for the impossibility of atemporal sustaining, we shall then turn to Paul Helm's defense of eternalism.

Two Views on Time

According to J. M. E. McTaggart, there are two ways of looking at a series of positions in time. First, time theorists understand one type of series of positions as either having an 'earlier than' or 'later than' relation, otherwise known as a *B* series. The second way of understanding a series position in time is what is known as an *A* series. An *A* series understands positions in time as being either past or present or future. McTaggart held that both the A and *B* series' have problems, which led him to believe in the paradoxical conclusion of the unreality of time.[55]

[55] J. M. E. McTaggart "Time" in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter Van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 67-74.

The *B* series of time (or the B-theory)[56] is also known as the "static" or "stasis" view of time.[57] When philosophers of time speak of the B-theory of time, they mean, as with McTaggart, that time consists of "earlier than" and "later than" relations, yet, these relations are part of a "four-dimensional space-time solid."[58] In other words, all moments of time coexist. According to Russell Stannard, a proponent of the B-theory of time, time must be understood as a fourth prong to our universe. We can imagine the universe existing with its three dimensions of space and one dimension of time as a four dimensional space-time block. Past, present and future are all a part of the universe, and hence, time in this way is static. Every point of time, like space, has "equal footing." There is no privileged point of time. All time exists, including the future.[59]

> One must also not get lured into thinking of a separate time outside four-dimensional space-time . . . What it means is that four-dimensional space-time does not change. Something can only change *in time*. But space-time is not in time . . . So, for example, at this instant in time not only does Portsmouth exist, but also New York, Hong Kong, planet Jupiter, and distant galaxies. So all of space exists at each point in time. What *this* is saying is that likewise at each point in space, all of time exists. At this point of space here—in this hall—all of time exists: the day work started on building the hall, the instant you entered it this morning, this present moment, your leaving it, the day the hall gets demolished. It all exists here—in some sense. I stress "in some sense."[60]

---

[56]In addition, the *A* series is also known as the A-theory of time. Hereafter, A-theory and B-theory will be used throughout the remainder of this inquiry.

[57] Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 4; Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 4; Russell Stannard, "On the Developing Scientific Understanding of Time" in *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley (Waco: Baylor University, 2005), 52.

[58] J. J. C. Smart, "The Space-Time World: an Excerpt from Philosophy and Scientific Realism" in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter Van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 95. In 1908, the German mathematician, Hermann Minkowski, used Albert Einstein's theory of STR to propose a theory that the universe exists as a four-dimensional geometrical structure. According to Minkowski's theory, there are three spatial dimensions and a fourth dimension of time. These dimensions come together to form a unified structure called space-time. See William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 165-166.

[59]Stanard, 52.

[60] Ibid.

However, Stannard recognizes the tension that exists between the physical nature of the universe and the universal notion of the "now" of time. He proposes that our mental experience of the world and the world as it actually is are two separate ways of viewing time, "[w]hat this means is that all of *physical* time exists at the instant of *mental* time called 'now'—and indeed at every other instant of mental time."[61] In a similar manner, J. J. C. Smart argues that the notion of temporal becoming is "anthropocentric."[62] Smart goes on to say "instead of talking of things or processes changing or not changing we can now talk of one time slice or four-dimensional entity *being* different or not different from some other time slice."[63] Central to the B-theory of time is the notion that there is no real change, only the appearance of change. Any appearance of change, claims the B-theorist, is mind dependent and thus, if there were no human beings, then neither would there be the concept of past, present and future.

In contrast to the B-theory, the A-theory of time, also known as the "dynamic" or "process" view of time, recognizes the reality of temporal becoming.[64] Fundamental to the A-theory is the notion that the past is truly past, i.e., that the past is no more, and that the future has not yet come into existence. Only the "present episode of an object exists."[65] Unlike the B-theory, the dynamic view of time recognizes that the process of change is an ontological reality of the universe, not mind dependent.

---

[61] Ibid. 54.

[62]Smart, 94.

[63] Ibid.

[64] DeWeese, *God and the Nature*, 4; Padgett, *God, Eternity*, 4;

[65] Padgett, *God, Eternity*, 4.

The Argument from the Impossibility of Atemporal Sustaining

Now that both theories on time have been examined, attention shall be given to Craig's argument for God's temporality based on the impossibility of atemporal sustaining and acting in a temporal universe. Consider the following argument:

1. God is creatively active in the temporal world

2. If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world

3. If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal

4. Therefore, God is temporal.[66]

As Craig reminds us, this argument does not argue for God's essential temporality; rather, that God is temporal by virtue of being Creator of a temporal world.[67] Craig thinks that (1) is an essential belief for Christian theism. The crucial part of Craig's argument is (2). "It seems," claims Craig, "inconceivable that God's causal relation to the world and the events/things in it could be regarded as anything other than a real relation. Indeed, God's being related to the world as cause to effect seems to be a paradigm example of a real relation."[68] Thus (3) is derived from the "inconceivability of divorcing an agent's being form his actions or his actions from their effects in such a way that the effects could be temporal but the agent timeless." If God created the world as an A-series, that is consisting of a true past, present and future, then God sustains each event that takes place.

Similarly, Alan Padgett raises an objection to the notion of an atemporal being acting within a temporal universe. According Padgett, for the universe to remain in

---

[66] William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 87.

[67] Ibid.

[68] William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity* (Boston: Kluwer, 2001), 57.

existence, it must at all times be sustained by God. Everything, including matter, energy and the natural laws within the universe are sustained by God. Thus if God were to stop sustaining the universe, then the universe would simply cease to exist, or as Thomas Aquinas put it: "Were God to annihilate, it would not be through some action (*per aliquam actionem*) but through the cessation from action."[69] Each moment of God's sustaining creation is "a direct act."[70] A direct act, claims Padgett, is an act God performs such that it "excludes any created causal chain between the divine cause and its effect."[71] All causes and effects which God sustains through His direct acts are "Zero Time Related,"[72] i.e., no time takes place between God's direct act and "its immediate effect."[73] Now consider two events, B and C, suggests Padgett:

> Say that God acts such that, at some time *T4*, some episode *B* of an object was sustained. Further, at the present time, *T5*, God acts so as to sustain a different object's episode, *C*, which is in the same place as *B*. Now *T4* and *T5* are some distance apart in time, and not Zero Time Related. Can the same divine, eternal, immutable act sustain both *B* and *C*? Since *T5* [*sic;* read: *T4*] is not, *B* no longer exists, and so is not being sustained, either in our time or in eternity, by any act of God. Since God's sustaining of *C* is direct, he cannot (logically cannot) sustain *C* by an act whose effect is dated at *T4*, and by some causal chain indirectly sustains *C*-at-*T5*. Furthermore, the present effect of God's eternal act at *T5* is Zero Time Related with the eternal intention of God; but this same eternal intention and act cannot also be Zero Time Related to *B*, since *B* and *C* are not themselves Zero Time Related. By a single, timeless act God can sustain *C* and any episode Zero Time Related to *C*. But since the divine sustaining is a direct act which must be Zero Time Related to its effect, the same divine act cannot sustain both *C* and *B*. At the present time (*T5*) B is not real, and so a different act (different, that is, than the act which sustained *B*) is now called for if God is to sustain *C*. The particular intention plus power-to-act, such that *B*-at*T4* is sustained, can only sustain episodes Zero Time Related to *T4*.[74]

---

[69] Quoted by Padgett in *God, Eternity*, 20.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid. 72.

[74] Ibid.

Given the A-theory of time, all that truly exists is the present. The past no longer exists and the future has not yet come into existence. The force of Padgett's argument is that each direct act of God's sustaining some event is intentional and volitional. Craig, commenting on this point in Padgett's argument, points out that "[t]he act of power whereby God produced *B* is not the same act of power by which He is producing *C*, for at t_4 *C* was not being produced. Since God is sustaining *C* and no longer sustaining *B*, therefore, He has changed."[75] Now the objector may respond by suggesting that any event that takes place in time occurs because God timelessly wills that it occur. But this depends on what one means by "will." If "will" means design, then God's timelessly willing some event to take place would be feasible, but if the notions of "intention" and "power-to-act" are included, then the objector's argument fails because the effects of God's intending and the bringing about of some future event do not yet exist.[76]

If Craig and Padgett's arguments are correct, then it would seem that an atemporal being could not sustain or act within a temporal universe, without somehow becoming temporal by virtue of His sustaining the universe. But this argument can be turned. The pinch of their arguments depends on both Craig and Padgett's commitment to an A-theory of time. Suppose that a B-theory of time were true, would it not then be possible that God timelessly sustains the universe without changing and without becoming temporal by virtue of His sustaining the entire space-time universe. This is exactly the point argued for by Paul Helm. In what follows, Helm's argument for the possibility of God's sustaining the universe, apart from change, will be examined.

---

[75] Craig, *God, Time*, p. 59

[76] Padgett, *God, Eternity*, 73.

The Eternalist Response

Contra Craig and Padgett, Helm argues that God's creation and sustaining of the universe occurs apart from any change. According to Helm, God does not "act" in the universe. For if God were to act in the universe, then God would be temporal; rather, one should speak of God timelessly (tenselessly) producing the entire space-time universe. God's producing the universe is not a change in God nor is it a change "*in time* . . . . Rather it is the free determination of the mind to bring about what is chosen."[77] Thus, like Aquinas, Helm believes that God's bringing about something is directly related to God's eternal unchanging will. Now by "producing", Helm means that God tenselessly brings about the entire space-time universe through one eternal act.

For Helm, God's producing the universe involves two features: the logical contingency of the universe and that "the universe has temporal development."[78] If God would not have willed the universe, then it would have never come into existence. But how should we understand the temporal development of the universe? What would such a universe look like? Here is where the B-theory of time becomes important for Helm. He recognizes that if God had created the space-time universe as an A-series of temporal relations, then God would be temporal.

> So it makes better sense for the eternalist to suppose that God created the temporal order as a B-series. Form the divine standpoint no one moment of the series would be privileged by being present, but as regards presentness, pastness or futurity, all moments would be in exactly the same position, even though some moments would be earlier in relation to others in the series, some later. It is a temporal order, in which causal powers operate. And yet it is a B-series of rather special kind, whose every moment is also eternally present to God. [79]

---

[77] Paul Helm, *Eternal God, A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 69.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Paul Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," in *God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory Ganssle* (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press. 2001), 58. Helm's use of the B-theory of time, here, seems odd, for it

Within a B-series, events are fixed. There is no true becoming as there is in the A-series; rather, all events occur in "earlier than" and "later than" relations. Now if God creates the entire space-time universe, with all events existing tenselessly within the created order, then God's timelessness and strong immutability is preserved, since God's sustaining of the space-time universe is one eternal act.

Helm's view of creation hinges on making a distinction between, (what I shall call) "logical causation" and "temporal causation". For the eternalist, "there need be no temporal first moment of creation, and so the universe need not have begun (temporally) to exist",[80] says Helm. All that is required is a logical contingency. The temporal universe that exists is a contingent existence. Thus the relation that God has to the temporal universe is an eternal relation. God could have eternally decreed that a different world exist or that no world exist, but this does not imply that the world have a temporal beginning. Scripture only implies that the contingency of the universe be such that "its existence is not logically necessary, and that it owes its existence to the agency of God—it depends on him."[81] There is no temporal "before", when scripture speaks of God existing before the creation; rather, God's existing before the creation means that God exists in a logical priority, i.e., a "hierarchical" relation to the universe.

So claims Helm,

He wants to have something like a hybrid view between the two. According to McTaggart, there can be no real change occurring within the universe if the B-theory of time is true, since all of the positions within the four-dimensional space-time universe are fixed. There can only be change if the A-theory is true. So how can there be any kind of "causal powers" which Helm speaks of. Further, there is no "past", "present', or "future", since all series of events are equally real and equally existent within the block universe.

[80] Helm, *Divine Timeless*, 49.

[81] Ibid.

> . . . God is before the creation not by virtue of existing at a time when the universe was not yet in existence, but by virtue of his necessity and the creation's contingency and of the universe's causal dependence on him. Everything created (except the temporal order itself) is necessarily in time, mutable and (so) corruptible; anything that exists uncreatedly is necessarily eternal, immutable and incorruptible."[82]

Helm recognizes that the way he is using "cause", as in "a timeless God's causing or bringing about the universe", is a stretch from the usual sense; however, says Helm, causality does not require temporality.[83] To give an analogy of what Helm has in mind when he speaks of God having a hierarchical causal relation to the world, we could imagine a timeless world *w** in which the god of that world, Atlas, holds the world on His back without any change. Atlas sustains the world with his power. If Atlas where not there, then neither would be the world. Therefore, Atlas is necessary and the world is dependent upon Him.[84] Yet, as stated earlier, the reason for the world's existing is a result of God's eternally willing it so. God's willing the universe does not change and neither does God's eternal action. To say that God creates the universe means that God tenselessly produces the entire space-time universe. While there is temporal order within the universe, the universe itself has no beginning. If there is no beginning to the universe then it would seem that God does not change in bringing the universe into existence and, given the B-theory of time, God does not change by sustaining each temporal event.

Now that the arguments against and for the possibility of God's sustaining a temporal universe have been examined, a critique of the eternalist's position shall be given.

---

[82] Ibid., 52.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 59.

Critique of the Eternalist's Response

If eternalism is correct, then God does not sustain each individual event as they pass in and out of existence; rather, God timelessly and tenselessly sustains the entire space-time universe, all events included, by and through one eternal act. On such a view, William Lane Craig points out:

> The picture of God existing alone without the universe and bringing the universe into existence at $t = 0$ presupposes the reality of temporal becoming and thus a dynamic theory of time. But on the static theory, God and the universe are coeternal; even the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is an unchanging state. The four-dimensional space-time universe is temporal only in the sense that one of its internal dimensions is time; extrinsically it exists as timelessly as God. Creation is reduced to the ontological dependence of the universe on God.[85]

While such a notion as the "ontological dependence of the universe on God" might seem odd to many Christian theists, it is nevertheless logically consistent.

But why think God created the space-time universe as a B-series? Helm provides no justification for adopting the B-theory other than it preserves eternalism. He thinks that in any "philosophical position" there is a "trade off". For the eternalist, it means giving up a view of time that allows for temporal change and becoming. On the other hand, the temporalist position, such as that of Craig and Padgett's, rejects pure eternalism in favor of an A-theory of time.[86]

Helm's point is taken—there is a tradeoff. Nevertheless, an A time series is ontologically different than a B time series, and ultimately, how one views time is a statement about how one views reality. The question one must wrestle with is whether

---

[85] William Lane Craig, "A Response to Paul Helm," in *God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory Ganssle* (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press. 2001), 65.

[86] Paul Helm, *Eternalism Contra Craig*, 4-5. http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2008/01/eternalism-contra-craig.html. (April 3, 2008).

one's view of time meets the facts about the way things really are. It is not enough for a metaphysical theory to be logically consistent, but it must also include "factually adequacy" and provide "explanatory power."[87] Thus the truth of either the A-theory or B-theory of time is just one of the factors pertaining to a theory of God's temporal mode of existence, and it must be considered, since, as was shown, whichever view one holds has significant implications on the problem of atemporal causality brought up by Craig and Padgett. Thus in what follows three arguments for an A-theory will be examined.

Argument from Time's Arrow and the Expanding Universe

Until recently, the majority scientific view has been that the universe always existed.[88] But this view began to change with the introduction of new empirical evidence pointing to a beginning of the space-time universe. The current working cosmological theory of the universe is that time, along with space, came into existence from an "explosion" called the "Big Bang." According Paul Davies, "whether one accepts all the details or not, the essential hypothesis – that there was some sort of creation – seems from the scientific point of view, compelling."[89] Albert Einstein predicted the Big Bang model of the universe while developing his theory of general relativity. What the theory of general relativity demonstrates is that the universe is "simultaneously expanding and

---

[87] William Hasker, *Metaphysics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 25-27. By factual adequacy, Hasker means that the metaphysical theory "must be in agree with the facts about the subject matter" p. 26. Explanatory power refers to a theories ability to take all of the facts available and brings enlightenment and unity to the theory.

[88] Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Science of God*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 22.

[89] Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1983), 10.

decelerating."[90] Such a view of an expanding universe would mean that something like an explosion had taken place. What evidence is there for such an explosion?

The first bit of empirical evidence supporting the "Big bang" is what scientists call a "red shift." In 1929 Edwin Hubble, while studying the distance between different galaxies, discovered "redshifting", which is a "shift in the spectrum of light emitted by the stars"[91] of distant galaxies. What this indicated is that the universe is expanding.[92] The second piece of evidence was discovered in 1964 by two scientists, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, who, while adjusting a communications satellite, discovered microwave background radiation in the universe.[93] Gerald Schroeder describes this background radiation as "a radiation background that is constant and equal in all directions of the universe."[94] The background radiation confirmed what astrophysicists predicted would be necessary for such an explosion as the "Big Bang." Additional evidence for the expansion of the universe is the second law of thermodynamics. As scientists examine the universe, they see it gradually heading toward a state of disorder. The second law of thermodynamics states that once energy is converted from one form to another, some of it (useful energy) is lost in the process.[95] Eventually all of the energy in the universe will be used up. Scientists have come up with ways to measure the amount of disorder in the universe left from used up energy. This is known as entropy. If the universe only has so

[90] Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, revised ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 52.

[91] Gerald L. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 72.

[92] Ibid., 52; John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 368; Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 47.

[93] Schroeder, *Genesis*, 74; Barrow Tipler, *The Anthropic Principle*, 368.

[94] Schroeder, *Genesis*, 74.

[95] Alan Padgett, *Science and the Study of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 126.

much energy, then it would seem that eventually it would come to an end. As Paul Davies puts it:

> If the universe has a finite stock of order, and is changing irreversibly towards disorder—ultimately to thermodynamic equilibrium—two very deep inferences follow immediately. The first is that the universe will eventually die, wallowing, as it were, in its own entropy. This is known among physicists as the 'heat death' of the universe. The second is that the universe cannot have existed forever, otherwise it would have reached its equilibrium end state an infinite time ago. Conclusion: the universe did not always exist.[96]

One of the inferences we can make from the above data is that there is an arrow to time. The other inference is that the universe will eventually come to an end. [97] If the universe had a beginning and will have an end, and it seems as though the universe is moving in a certain direction, then the dynamic or *A*-theory of time, based on the above evidence, seems to be the most plausible explanation for the nature of time in our universe.

Argument from Temporal Becoming

If the B-theory of time is true then the notion of temporal becoming is merely mind-dependent. Thus if there were no humans, then, there would be no need for reference to past, present and future. Any time relations would be either "earlier than" or "later than." [98] Against such a view, William Lane Craig presents the following argument:

1. The temporal becoming of mental events is either mind-dependent or it is not.

2. If it is not, then temporal becoming is objective.

---

[96] Davies, 11.

[97] Alan Padgett, *Science and the Study of God*, 123, 135; Note: According to John Polkinghorne, there exist five such arrows: 1) *The thermodynamic arrow*; 2) *The arrow of increasing complexity*; 3) *The cosmic arrow of the universe's expansion* 5) *The psychological arrow of human temporal experience*. (John Pokinghorne, *Time in Physics and Theology* in *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley [Waco: Baylor University, 2005], 65-66.) There seems to be an irreversibility found in each of these five arrows, all of which are pointing in the same direction.

[98] Smart, *The Space-Time World*, 94; Stannard

3. If it is, then temporal becoming is objective.

4. Therefore, temporal becoming is objective.[99]

The force of Craig's argument is that no matter which premise one goes after, it turns out that temporal becoming would be objective. If a static time theorist attacked premise two by denying that temporal becoming is mind dependent, then it seems that temporal becoming would be objective, otherwise, temporal becoming is just an illusion.

Craig lists two outs for the defender of the B-theory. First, the defender of the B-theory could hold to a kind of hybrid view where events outside of the mind are changeless, existing as "earlier than" and "later than" relations, while events in the mind truly have temporal becoming. But as Craig points out, such a view leads to an "absurd dualism."[100] Craig goes on to say:

> . . . why do I have the "now-awareness" of time t_1 instead of t_2? All the physical brain states at t_1 and t_2 never change, yet my now-awareness does change and is uniquely located. Why is there one privileged now-awareness?[101]

Further, Craig pinpoints two main problems with the theory that temporal becoming is mind dependent: Why time goes in a direction and why human beings seem to "share the same now."[102]

The second out for the B-theorist is to claim that mental events are as "equally real" as other events within the space-time universe, i.e., mental events are "strung out"

---

[99] Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 197-198.

[100] Ibid., 198.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 199.

along different points within the "earlier than" and "later than" relations.[103] Thus one's "now-awareness" of today is as equally real as one's "now-awareness" of yesterday or tomorrow. Mental events are just as locked into the changelessness of reality as are any other events. But the obvious problem with this is that such a view denies experience altogether.

Thus the view that temporal becoming is merely mind dependant is incoherent. It leads to the notion that all experience is just an illusion, and as Craig points out, even the illusion of temporal becoming "is self-refuting, since such an illusion itself involves becoming."[104]

Argument from Creation Ex Nihilo

The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, i.e., that the universe and all things within the universe came into existence out of nothing (not-anything), is essential to the classical Christian worldview, and it finds abundant support in Scripture.[105] Creation *ex nihilo* entered into the Christian tradition through Hebraic tradition and was advocated by the Church Fathers.[106] According to John 1:2, "all things came into being" through the Word. Similarly, the Apostle Paul, when speaking of the preincarnate Son of God, tells us that "by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been

---

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 200.

[105] See Gen 1:1; Ps 33:6-9; John 1:1, 3; Acts 4:24; Col 1:16; Heb 11:3

[106] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 83-87. For a great discussion on the doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo* see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17) Not only does God bring into existence everything within the universe through the Word, but He also sustains everything within creation. Hence, the universe is contingent and dependent on God for its existence.

But what does it mean to say that God creates something. First of all, one would expect that the notion of God's creating the universe to fall under God's omnipotence. If God is omnipotent, then God has the ability to bring it about that something other than God exists (say creation). But as was pointed out earlier, it seems that God's power-to-act is grounded in His will and intention. God wills something and whatever God wills comes about. Second, as Nelson Pike points out, the word 'creation' lacks a certain quality that we often attribute to "production-verbs." It is different from, say, "to build" or "to make." For, "to build" or "to make" something implies that there exists something in which one can use to perform those kinds of actions. For instance, we might use brick and mortar to build a house. When God created, He used no pre-existing materials. Pike suggests that God's creating the universe carries more of the connotation of "conjuring up" something, e.g. that one conjures up an image.[107] But if eternalism is true, could this be said of God? Could God bring something into existence out of nothing? It would seem not. According to Helm, creation is logically contingent. There is no temporal beginning to creation. God timelessly produces the entire space-time universe through one eternal act. Further, for God to act by bringing creation into existence would mean that God changes (at least in an extrinsic kind of way) which is an impossibility for God.[108]

---

[107] Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 101-104.

Perhaps an analogy may help to elucidate the problem with the eternalist's position.

Let us imagine an atemporal projector. Within this projector is a generator of sorts that produces light, and in turn causes an image to be projected. This projector, however; has the unusual capability of projecting not just one frame, but the entire filmstrip at once. The image being produced is contingent on the projector which tenselessly produces the image. But at what point does the projector *begin* to produce the image, turn on, so to speak. Obviously, if the projector is tenselessly producing the image, it does not seem that there ever was a point when the image began to be projected.

Now this analogy, like any analogy, is limited, since the scenes being projected would have to be viewed by an atemporal observer. Nevertheless, the point of the analogy is that if creation is merely logically dependent on God, then there is no coming into being of creation. The whole of the images being projected are analogous to the whole of creation. All of the frames exist in one projected image without any changing from scene to scene. The projector itself, which produces the frames, is analogous to God who tenselessly produces the entire space-time universe. Thus there is no change in God's action and there is no change in creation.

The problem with eternalism on this point is that it emasculates the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Eternalist's, such as Helm, adopt the "logical dependency view" of creation in order to preserve the doctrine of absolute immutability. While scripture affirms that God is immutable in *a* strong sense, the view that God is absolutely immutable is neither espoused by scripture nor can one come to such conclusions based on Scripture's teaching. Further, to say that creation is merely "logically dependent"

---

[108] Change, here, does not mean that God changes in His nature or those essential properties which make God, God.

seems to limit God's omnipotence to nothing more than God's changelessly sustaining the universe. Such a conception boarders a Deistic view of the God-world relation.

Divine Timelessness and the Incarnation

It seems that for God the Son to become incarnate it would require Him to be located in space-time. But if God is timeless, then how can the Son of God take upon human flesh and yet remain timeless, especially, when Scripture speaks of the Son experiencing temporal relation to creation through the incarnation? If the incarnation is indeed, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, then the discussion on God's relationship to space-time must consider it. First, in what is below, we shall examine two passages that suggest the Son of God entered into space-time. Second, it will be shown that the language used by the early Fathers indicated that the Son entered into our space-time world. If God the Son entered into space-time, then whatever it means for God to be eternal, must take into consideration the possibility of such an event as the incarnation. Third, a philosophical argument for the Son's temporality will be given and defended.

Biblical Argument for the Son's Temporality

John 1:14 speaks of the Word becoming flesh, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It is clear from the context that the λόγος is referring to Jesus Christ. John bore witness of him (vv. 7 and15) and it is through him that grace and truth are realized. But what of the λόγος "becoming flesh"? Here the word used for become is ἐγένετο which comes from γίνωμαι. γίνωμαι is an aorist and functions as an ingressive, which means the beginning of a past occurrence. This is the same verb used in John 1:3, which is a reference to 'all things' coming into being. However, ἐγένετο does

not take that understanding here. As George Beasley-Murray asserts, "the verb γίνομαι in connection with a predicative noun expresses that a person or a thing changes its property or enters into a new condition, becomes something that it was not before."[109] There is no indication from John that the Word ceases being the Word. In this case, the Word 'becomes' flesh means that the Word enters into a new relation by adding flesh, or becoming human.

The word σάρξ is found in the predicate nominative position. In this context, σάρξ suggests the "one who is or becomes a physical being, living being with flesh,"[110] or again, as Wallace affirms, "σάρξ expresses that state into which the Divine Word entered by a definite act."[111] The language expressed here of the Word's "becoming flesh" is rather strong. It is hard to see how one could limit the language used here as anthropomorphic or poetic. As Timothy George puts it:

> What is flesh? Flesh is that part of our human reality which in fact is most susceptible to the ravaging of time. It is flesh that suffers pain. It is flesh that contracts cancer. It is flesh that we bury in the ground. This is what the Son of God became for us, says the Christian faith. This idea was, and still is, a remarkably shocking thought. It was put forth in the early Church over against the docetists, people who said that in Jesus Christ the Word of God touched the earth much as a tangent touches a circle, but that was it. In appearance Jesus seemed to be a real human being, but in fact this was not the case. He was a phantom-like apparition, a ghost.
>
> Against this idea, Ignatius of Antioch and the early Christian fathers say again and again, he was 'truly' born of the Virgin Mary. They use the Greek adverb *alēthōs* which means 'really,' 'truly,' 'surely.' That is why it got into the Apostles' Creed. He was *really* crucified under Pontius Pilate. He was *really* buried. He *really*, truly, rose again."[112]

---

[109] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John. Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 13-14.

[110] Ibid., 915.

[111] Wallace, *Beyond*, 268.

[112] Timothy George, "History, Hope, and Christianity" in *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley (Waco: Baylor University, 2005). 38.

Now by "becoming," we are not here suggesting that there was any mixing or altering of the two natures, nor are we implying that God the Son has now been transmuted into a creaturely human nature; rather, the second person of the Trinity is unified in one hypostatic union having both a human and divine nature. This union is indivisible. The divine nature does not cease being truly divine and in like manner the human nature remains truly human; yet, the two are found in one person. What we see taking place here in the Word's "becoming flesh" is the divine, second person of the Trinity, acquires flesh, i.e., takes on a human nature. Notice John's language. When he claims the Word "dwelt among us," it was not just the human nature that dwelt among the Jews in Palestine in A.D. 33; rather it was one, undivided and united divine person. This becomes clear as John selectively demonstrates the transition from the λόγος "with God" from the beginning to the same λόγος Who dwells among men. When John uses the word *dwelt* (ἐσκήνωσεν) it would have reminded the Jews of how the LORD dwelt among His covenant people in the wilderness. As Millard Erickson conveys, "[t]he term is a strong one, which literally means 'tabernacled among us' or 'pitched his tent among us.' It conveys the idea of a lengthy period of residence rather than a temporary visit."[113]

Also, we find Paul using language in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, similar to the way John speaks of the incarnation in John 1:14. In Colossians 1:19 Paul goes on to say that, in Jesus, πᾶν τὰ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι (all the fullness dwells), but the passage does not provide a subject of the above statement that directly answers "fullness of what"?[114] In order to clarify what Paul is stating the NAS provides the word "Father" while the NIV

[113] Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*: *A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 27.

[114] Ibid., 224.

uses "God" as the subject. Because of the ambiguity of the grammar, some have retorted that it becomes hard to determine to whom or what πλήρωμα refers. But as N. T. Wright points out, v. 20 explains v. 19. It was in and through Christ's incarnation that God reconciles "all things to Himself" (similar to what Paul claims in I Corinthians 5:19). [115]

Despite the ambiguity of Colossians 1:19, it can be clarified by comparing it, in the larger context, with Colossians 2:9: ὅτι ἐν αὐτῳ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς. In this passage, Paul is more specific and is likely referring back to what he wrote in 1:19. The two verses are almost identical except for 1:19 includes the word εὐδόκησεν while the words τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς are left out. Clearly Christ is the referent of "that in Him" (ὅτι ἐν αὐτω) and "fullness" (πλήρωμα) is the subject of dwells (κατοικει). But how should we understand πλήρωμα? Usually πλήρωμα takes the idea of "that which has been completed, fullness,"[116] and could focus on either "the process of being filled or the fact of being filled."[117] Paul qualifies πλήρωμα by "all" (πᾶν) and then quantifies it by "Deity" (τῆς θεότητος). τῆς θεότητος is a genitive which stresses the "content" of the "head noun," hence, in v. 9; the content of the "fullness" is "Deity."[118] Colossians 2:9 is the only occurrence of θεότης in the New Testament and should be distinguished from θειότης (see Rom. 1:20). Of the two, θεότης is the stronger and refers to the divine nature rather than

[115] N. T. Wright, Colossians and Philemon: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (first published 1986, Leicester: InterVarsity Press; reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 75.

[116] Reinier Schippers, "πληρόω," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 1, gen. ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 733.

[117] Ibid., 735.

[118] A "genitive of content" is a noun or adjective which amplifies the head noun, which is usually qualitative. Daniel Wallace stress that "The nominal genitive of content is distinct from the genitive of material in that content indicates the item contained while material indicates the material made out of." (Daniel Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 92).

merely divine virtues.[119] Thus the "fullness of Deity" refers to the fact that 'completeness' or 'fullness' of God's nature "dwells" (κατοικει) in "bodily form" (σωματικῶς) in Christ. Wright explains;

> The word translated 'in bodily form' can also mean 'actually' or 'in solid reality'. We should not, however, drive a wedge between the two. Part of Paul's point is that the incarnation, the taking of 'bodily' form by God, was and is the 'solid reality' in which were fulfilled…all the ancient promises that God would dwell with his people…[and] he is the embodiment and full expression of the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[120]

Similarly, James Dunn argues that:

> [t]he latter addition, σωματικῶς, reinforces the encounterable reality of the indwelling: as the human σῶμα is what enables a person to be in relationship with other persons, so the somatic character of this indwelling meant that God could be encountered directly in and through this particular human being, Christ.[121]

Thus what one can draw from John 1:14 and Colossians 2:9 is that God the Son entered space-time in a unique and particular way in and through the incarnation. When Scripture speaks of the Word's "becoming flesh" and "dwelling" among us, it is hard to see how God the Son could remain timeless by virtue of His entering into space-time, since timelessness means being devoid of any succession or movement and having no temporal or spatial extension or location. Further, it is hard to see how the language used here by Scripture to speak of God the Son "becoming flesh" and 'dwelling" could be anthropomorphic. For eternalism, any mention in Scripture of God's changing in His actions or responding to prayer is metaphorical. Yet, Scripture affirms that the Word

---

[119] R. McL. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon: The International Critical Commentary*, eds G. I. Davies and G. N. Staton (New York: T and T Clark International, 2005), 108. For a distinction between θεότης and θειότης see J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, reprint (revised from Macmillan and Company fourth printing; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 181.

[120] Wright, *Colossians*, 103.

[121] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 152.

dwelt among us, i.e., He entered into our space-time universe in the person of Jesus Christ

The Incarnation and Nicene Christianity

The Nicene Creed states that God the Father is "the Maker of all things visible and invisible."[122] This demonstrates, as Thomas Torrance points out, that "visible" and "invisible" are references to creation *ex nihilo* and that such language in the creed demonstrates that God, as the maker of heaven and earth is transcendent.[123] When the creed proclaims that the Word was "of the substance (ὁμοούσιον τῶ παρρί) of the Father. This literally means that the Son and the Father are "sharing one being."[124] The next part of the Creed we are concerned with is "came down and was made flesh, and became man."[125] When it refers to the Son "coming down," this does not imply that the Son travels through space to get to earth; rather, in becoming man this speaks of God's "pure condescension."[126] Torrance reminds us that we should not understand the Son's entering into space-time as in some way an "imperfection" nor should we think of it as the Son somehow became conditioned by space; rather, through His self-condescension

---

[122] "Nicene Creed," in *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., eds. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

[123] Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 2.

[124] Benttenson, "Nicene Creed", 27. See footnotes.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 3.

the Son of God's presence was actually here in space-time. Yet, He remained of the same substance with the Father.[127]

At Chalcedon, the Fathers established some clear boundaries concerning the incarnation. The Creed of Chalcedon recognized that in the incarnation of the Son of God there exist two distinct natures. In this case, there is a divine nature which includes those properties that make a person divine, and, a human nature which includes those properties that make a person human. A second element is that the two natures exist in one 'hypostatic' union. In this union, neither nature is "annulled." The two natures remain distinct in the union, yet joined together to form one person. It is not as if the two natures were blended to form some kind of hybrid; rather, the two natures are indivisible from one another, i.e., they cannot separate. Thus Chalcedon "recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPERATION."[128] But what does the Chalcedonian definition mean when it claims that the two natures are "without change?" Does this mean that God is without change in any sense?[129] Such a strict interpretation does not seem to be the case. Thomas Torrance explains:

> Now the doctrine of the immutability and impassibility of God as we find it in the patristic theology is ambiguous. It means that God is not moved by, and is not changed by, anything outside himself, and that he is not affected by anything or does not suffer form anything beyond himself. In this sense the immutability and impassibility of God refer to the eternal tranquility and serenity of God in his transcendence over all the changes and chances, all the pain and violence, of our world. But it does not mean that God does not move himself and is incapable of imparting motion to what he has made. It does not mean that God in himself is devoid of passion, devoid of love, or devoid of mercy, that he is impassibly and immutably related to our world of space and time in such a way that it is thrown back upon itself as a

[127] Ibid.

[128] Chalcedonian Creed, in *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., eds. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56.

[129] Earlier we concluded that God changes in His activity and in His relationships, yet, He does not change in His ontological nature, character, will, or plans.

> closed continuum of cause and effect. I grant that patristic theology was tempted constantly by the thrust of Greek thought to change the concepts of impassibility and immutability in this direction, but it remained entrenched within the orbit of Judeo-Christian doctrine of the living God who moves himself, who through free love created the universe, imparting to its dynamic order, and who through the outgoing of his love moves outside of himself in the incarnation.[130]

There is no doubt that early Fathers believed that God was eternal and immutable; however, as Torrance pointed out in the above passage, they did not construe those attributes in such a way that God could not enter into space-time. Much of what drove Athanasius and the early Christians was soteriology. Anything less than divine could not provide adequate atonement for sin. [131] For this reason the Word became flesh:

> that you may know that the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appearing among men. For of His becoming Incarnate we were the object, and for our salvation He dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born even in human body.[132]

Also, Athanasius explains that the "incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes into our realm."[133] Such a concept of God entering into the world was in no way impossible for Athanasius. Even before the incarnation God's presence filled the universe. Through the incarnation, though, God entered into creation in a new way, coming "in condescension to shew loving-kindness upon us, and to visit us."[134] Through the Word's becoming flesh, He accomplished two things. First, was to rid us of death by giving us new life, and, second, to make Himself known, i.e., the invisible became

---

[130] Thomas Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980), 65-66.

[131] Kelly, 377-378, 381.

[132] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4:2-3.

[133] Ibid., 8:1

[134] Ibid., 2: 8.

visible.[135] Thus, Athanasius asserts:

> For He was not, as might be imagined, circumscribed in the body, nor, while present in the body, was He absent elsewhere; nor while He moved the body, was the universe left void of His working and Providence; but, thing most marvelous, Word as He was, so far from being contained by anything, He rather contained all things Himself; and just as while present in the whole of Creation, He is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by His own power—giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included, but being in His own Father alone wholly and in every respect.[136]

Athanasius' understanding of the incarnation provides some powerful insights to our discussion on time and space. Here we see that God the Son was present within the world, moving and operating within the world, and yet He was not in any way bound by it. Also, Athanasius claims that while the Son's presence is everywhere within the created realm, He remains distinct from it. Similarly, it is argued in the *Tome of Leo*:

> because being invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain was content to be contained: abiding before all time He began to be in time: the LORD of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant: being God that cannot suffer, He did not disdain to be man that can, and, immortal as He is, to subject Himself to the laws of death. [137]

In becoming flesh, the Son remained what He was, yet, He entered into space-time, taking on the form of a servant, and as invisible God, become visible to us (Col 1:15).

What we can conclude from the above discussion is that the early Church was concerned more with whether or not, in the incarnation, the Son of God would have ceased being God. The driving factor behind the early Church, particularly with Athanasius, was whether anything less than divine could provide adequate atonement for sin. However, if God the Son changed in His nature through the incarnation, then He

---

[135] Ibid., 16.5

[136] Ibid., 17.1-2

[137] *Tome of Leo, Letters XXVIII. IV.*

would no longer be God and there could be no salvation. In the same manner, if he were not truly man, then there could be no atonement. Nevertheless, the early Church held that God the Son truly entered into space-time and yet, by doing so, He did not alter His divine nature. Therefore, the divine eternal nature must be such that entering into space-time could be possible. He was not bound by doing so, yet He remained transcendent and eternal with the Father in one substance (ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί).[138]

A Philosophical Argument for the Son's Temporality

What has been agued thus far is that Scripture speaks of the Son of God as temporal. The language used by John and Paul is the strongest language possible to demonstrate that the Son of God entered into space-time. The Word truly "dwelt" among us. Further, the language used by the early Church Fathers included the concept of God the Son entering into our space-time. The Son had to become like us in our humanity (apart from sin) in every way in order for us to have salvation (Heb 4:15). Yet, the Father's rejected any notion that, in becoming flesh, the divine Word, the Son of God, ceased being divine by His entering into space-time. Thus whatever it means for the divine nature to be eternal, it must include the possibility for God the Son to enter into space-time. Given that scripture and the early Church thought that the Son of God entered into space-time, we shall now examine an argument by Thomas Senor for the temporality of the Son of God:

P1) Jesus Christ read in the synagogue (at the start of His ministry)
C1) So, temporal predicates apply to Jesus Christ
P2) Jesus Christ = God the Son
C2) So, temporal predicates apply to God the Son
P3) Temporal predicates don't apply to timeless beings

[138] "Nicene Creed," Bettenson, footnote 27.

C3) So, God the Son isn't timeless[139]

If the above argument is correct, then it raises the obvious difficulty: If the first and third persons of the Trinity are timeless, then how could the second person be temporal. As Garrett DeWeese puts it, while "this does not prove that God is temporal, it does make atemporality look suspect."[140]

Brian Leftow objects to Senor's argument. He thinks that Senor's argument rests on the faulty assumption that God the Son could not be timelessly incarnate. Let us suppose that the person of Jesus consists of S(soul) + B(body) + Son of God. Now, in order for the Son of God to be human, then it would require the whole, i.e. S + B + Son of God to exist. According to Leftow, the Son of God is the first part of the whole, much like the first brick of a wall. While the first brick is not the whole of the wall, nevertheless, it is a part of it. Now, if the rest of the wall were never built, claims Leftow, then one brick which had been laid would be enough for an individual to think that it is the first part of the wall, simply because the solitary brick represents the builder's intent behind building the wall. How does this translate into our discussion on the incarnation? If the Son is part of the whole, i.e. S + B + Son of God, then it is proper to call the Son human, even though S + B do not appear until 4 BC. For, it is in God's intentions that the Son of God be joined to S + B, therefore, timelessly God intends for the Son to be united with S + B. Since it was in God's intentions timelessly for the Son of God to be united with S + B, then any change occurs only in temporal things, and not in God.[141]

---

[139] Thomas Senor, "Incarnation and Timelessness" in *Faith and Philosophy* v. 7 n. 2 (April 1990), 150.

[140] Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 233.

[141] Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate" in *The Incarnation*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 295-299.

The problem with Leftow's argument is, as Garrett DeWeese points out, this "response [S + B + Son of God] puts Leftow in the position of arguing that the timeless Son stands in a unifying causal relation with the temporal parts S+B such that a substance (the Son+S+B) with both timeless and temporal parts results."[142] As previously demonstrated, the very notion of atemporal causation and atemporal sustaining is a difficult one (provided that the A-theory of time is true). It seems that in order for God to sustain a temporal universe, or any temporal thing, God would become temporal by virtue of His sustaining it. Further, how can the divine nature be united with the human nature, yet without somehow being affected by the temporality of the human nature? On this point, even Leftow admits this raises a problem "Just what relations God has to S + B in virtue of the incarnate—taking on flesh . . . Certainly God has certain thoughts and sensations due to this which he would not have had otherwise."[143] Leftow's solution is to argue that the Son always, timelessly, had these thoughts and experiences, and any "relations" that the timeless Son of God has to these events are causal and not temporal.[144] But again, this leads back to the problem of atemporal causation and sustaining. Leftow does not think that causal relations are temporal, but as was demonstrated earlier, if each individual event is sustained by God, then it is hard to see how God remains atemporal by virtue of His sustaining temporal events. Let us suppose that the Son timelessly exists apart from S + B, then at t_1, in our space-time universe, the Son exists united to S + B. At t_1 we can claim: "The Son is united to S + B." But this

---

[142] Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004),

[143] Leftow, "Timeless God Incarnate," 299.

[144] Ibid.

could also be said of times t_2, t_3, t_4, and so on. Thus the Son is united to S + B through a series of temporal events. Now, if the Son part is atemporal (meaning: a mode of existence apart from any temporal succession) and the S + B parts are temporal (meaning: a mode of existence with temporal succession), how could it be said that the Son is united to S + B. Suppose the defender of divine timelessness claims that the Son's uniting with the S + B in Jesus Christ is, in fact, God's eternally willing that certain actions, thoughts, and intentions *A, B, C, D*. . . be displayed through S + B at certain times t_1, t_2, t_3, t_4 . . . But this does not seem to help the eternalist either. For, if that were the case, it would seem that something like Adoptionism is taking place, i.e., that S + B was chosen by God as His Son and to display certain "God-like" qualities within the world.

Let us turn now to a second objection to Leftow's argument. To the defender of the "composite account", [145] Senor poses the following question: Is Jesus Christ identical to God the Son? Classical Christianity would say "yes", but could Leftow say that Jesus Christ is identical to God the Son? It would seem not. According to Leftow, the S + B of Jesus Christ could have constituted a person had the Son not joined with the S + B. But since the Son joined with S + B at conception, then, the sum of the Son, S, and B form a "larger person".[146] Senor finds Leftow's solution problematic. He explains:

> And herein is a significant problem for the CA: it must, in the end, deny this, *i.e., Jesus Christ and God the Son are identical*. Recall that JC, is a composite consisting of GS, and the human body and mind assumed in the incarnation. So if GS is but a proper part of the individual who is Jesus Christ, then the friend of the CA is committed to saying that GS and JC are not identical.[147]

---

[145] Thomas Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation" in *Faith and Philosophy* v. 24, n. 1 (Jan 2007), 56. "Composite account" is the term Senor uses when referring to Leftow's position. Please note: GS = God the Son, JC = Jesus Christ, and CA = Composite Account

[146] Leftow, *A Timeless God Incarnate*, 282.

[147] Senor, p. 56.

Further,

> . . . the fact that the CA is committed to JC's not being a person falls out of what Leftow says earlier when he claims that no natural kind can have a member of that same natural kind as a proper part. . . . But Leftow thinks that persons are natural kinds. Thus, if GS is a person (and surely that is nonnegotiable) then either JC is not a person or GS isn't part of JC.[148]

Since, according to Leftow, God the Son is a proper part of the composite Jesus Christ [Son + S + B], the two cannot be identical. However, as Senor points out, no one would deny that God the Son is a person. Therefore, such a view, insists Senor, leads to one of two consequences: that "either Nestorianism is true and there are two persons in the incarnation, or God Incarnate – Jesus Christ – is not a person."[149] Which, both are to be rejected on pain of heresy.

One other possible out for the eternalist is to suggest that the Son has always been incarnate. This seems to be the position advocated by Eleoenore Stump and Norman Kretzmann and by Paul Helm. In defending the doctrine of divine timelessness, Stump and Kretzmann recognize the difficulty of the incarnation and suggest:

> The divine nature of the second person of the Trinity, like the divine nature of either of the other persons of the Trinity, cannot become temporal; nor could the second person at some time acquire a human nature he does not eternally have. Instead, the second person eternally has two natures….[150]

But what exactly do they mean by saying that the Son of God "eternally has two natures"? Stump and Kretzmann could be taken two ways, here. First, they could mean that the Son of God never assumed a human nature, i.e., he has had the human nature eternally. But this would be unorthodox. The second way to take Stump and Kretzmann

---

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 78, No. 8 (Aug., 1981), 453.

is to understand them meaning that the Son did not assume "a human nature at *some time.*"[151] Similarly to Stump and Kretzmann, Paul Helm makes the following argument:

> One thing to note is that if God the Son is timelessly eternal and yet incarnate in Jesus Christ, there is no time in his existence when he was not incarnate, though since he became incarnate at a particular time in our history there were times in that history before the incarnation, and times since . . . . The incarnation is the "projection" of the eternal God. There is therefore no sense in talking of the eternal Son of God apart from the incarnation except to make the point that the incarnation was logically contingent. That is, there is no point to it if by this we mean there was a time when the eternal Son of God existed unincarnated. It is of course possible for us to *think* of the eternal Son of God as unincarnated, by an abstraction thought, but that is a different matter. The point is….there is no preexistent Christ with a life history independent of and prior to the incarnation. There was no time when the eternal God was not Jesus of Nazareth . . . .The Son of God is conceptually or ontologically prior to the incarnate Jesus, but not temporally prior. He is conceptually prior because being the Son of God he is not created, and he took our flesh, in just the same way in which, though there was not time when the creation was not, God eternally willed the universe, and hence is logically and ontologically prior to the universe.[152]

In both cases, what is being argued for is that the divine nature is somehow timelessly, or perhaps, tenselessly united to the human nature. But this is problematic. In order for the timeless Son of God to be tenselessly united to the human nature, one would have to appeal to a B-theory of time. As was pointed out, there are some major theological and philosophical reasons for rejecting the B-theory. But let us examine this notion further. Suppose one adopts the B-theory as a possible way out for eternalism, how would such a view fit with the Christian doctrines of redemption and eternal life?

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8 that not only are human beings going to be redeemed, but all of creation, i.e., a kind of cosmic redemption.

> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we

[151] Senor, *Incarnation and Timelessness*, 158.

[152] Ibid., 55.

> ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:19-23)

Similarly, in Colossians 1:20, Paul encourages us with the fact that it is through Christ that "all things" will be reconciled to God. However, if the B-theory of time is correct, will creation ever have freedom from the effects of evil? Does Christ ever triumph over the power of death and of sin? William Lane Craig forcefully demonstrates that if the B-theory is true then evil is never properly dealt with:

> On the static theory of time, evil is never really vanquished from the world: It exists just as sturdily as ever at its various locations in space-time, even if those locations are all earlier than some point in cosmic time (for example, Judgment Day). Creation is never really purged of evil on this view; at most it can be said that evil only infects those parts of creation which are earlier than certain other events. But the stain is indelible. What this implies for events such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is very troubling. In a sense Christ hangs permanently on the cross, for the dreadful events of A.D. 30 never fade away or transpire. The victory of the resurrection becomes a hollow triumph, for the spatio-temporal parts of Jesus that were crucified and buried remain dying and dead and are never raised to new life.[153]

Such a picture of Christ's redemptive work takes away the significance of Christ's dying "once for all" on behalf of our sin (Heb 9:12; 28).

Further, scripture speaks of believers as living forever. But if the universe exists as a four-dimensional space-time solid, then how are we to understand the biblical teaching of eternal life? If all events exist as *earlier than* and *later than* relations, then my living in a glorified state exists equally as real as my living in a non-redemptive state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the doctrines of creation and incarnation provide strong objections to divine timelessness. Further, we have defined immutability in light of scripture and of some recent treatments of the doctrine, such that, God does not change in His essence,

[153] Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 214.

character, plan or purposes. Equally important, scripture affirms that God changes in His activity and His relationships toward His creatures. But if God changes in his activity and in His relationships, then He would be temporal in some sense. For, an absolutely changeless and timeless being could not act in the world, nor could He change in His relationships toward His creatures. But how are we to understand God's temporality? What does it mean to say that God is "in time?" Moreover, if God is in time, would He not be akin to the God of Process or Open Theism?

CHAPTER THREE

OMNITEMPORALITY AS GOD'S TEMPORAL MODE OF EXISTENCE

In chapter one an exposition was given of Paul Helm's defense of the medieval notion of divine timelessness. For Helm, such a doctrine rests on the intuition of divine fullness and absolute immutability. But as was shown in chapter two, based on the impossibility of God's sustaining a temporal universe without Himself becoming temporal and on the argument that in the incarnation, God the Son entered into space-time, there is reason to call into question eternalism's use of absolute immutability to support divine timelessness. In this chapter we shall focus on presenting a coherent understanding of God's temporal mode of existence. The first part of this chapter will demonstrate that the temporalist can maintain a balance between the classical Christian doctrines of transcendence and immanence. The second part will examine two models of divine temporality, offering a synthesis approach to understanding God's temporal mode of existence.

Temporalism: A Balance between Transcendence and Immanence

Any theory on the doctrine of God must take into consideration Scripture's teaching on God's transcendence and immanence. Transcendence means that God is "other" than this world. He is the creator of all that exists and everything that exists finds its being and existence in, by, for and through Him (Gen 1:1; Isa 44: 24; John 1:3; Rom

4:17; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3). He is not bound by the world in any temporal or spatial kind of way; rather, he exists ontologically outside of created space-time. Further, He is beyond creation in His holiness, knowledge and His moral character (Isa 6:1, 3; 46: 9-10; 58:8-9; 1 Cor 1:25). On the other hand, Scripture speaks of God as immanently involved with the world. This does not mean, as in Process theology, that God is somehow enmeshed in processes of the world; instead, Scripture speaks of God acting in and caring for the world (Ex 20: 1; Matt 5:45; 6:26-30; Acts 17:27-28).

There are some passages which speak of both God's immanence and transcendence. For instance, Paul's address to the Athenians on Mars Hill stresses that God is the creator of everything. He is not bound to any physical location, yet He is the one who gives life to men. Further, He wants men to seek after Him, since "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:22-28). Another passage which speaks to both God's immanence and transcendence is Isaiah 57:15. In this passage Isaiah writes: "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell [on] a high and holy place, And [also] with the contrite and lowly of spirit . . .'" Thus it is clear that Scripture speaks of both God's transcendence and immanence. In what follows is an attempt to demonstrate a balance between God's transcendence and immanence.

Temporalism and God "in" Created Space-time?

One common misconception argued for by the eternalist is that God "in" time is a contradiction. Similarly, if God is in time, could it not be said of God that He is "in" space as well. We shall examine, first, the argument that God is "in" time. It would seem that if this argument fails, then so too would the argument that God is in space. But

before moving to the first argument it is important to distinguish between "kinds" of time.

Unfortunately, many philosophical theologians develop their theory of God's temporal mode of existence ever before considering what time is. When contemplating the notion of time, it is important to distinguish between kinds of time. For instance, as noted earlier, there is a difference between an A-series of time events and a B-series of time events. These two views lead to two quite different outlooks on the nature of reality. But these are not the only distinctions that can be made. The philosophical theologian can distinguish between at least four "kinds" of time: Psychological time; Physical time; Cosmic time; and Metaphysical time. Each of these distinctions shall be examined below.[1]

First, psychological time refers to a kind of time that is consciously experienced by an individual. Each person has her own psychological time, yet, it seems that whether an event passes quickly or slowly, the arriving at the end of the event indicates that psychological time is grounded in an objective time outside of the individual. Second, by physical time, philosophers of time mean a kind of time that can be measured by clocks. To put it differently "'Physical' or 'clock time' refers to time in any temporal world where laws of nature allow for the measurement of time with some physical clock. This is possible only if the laws of nature in the world allow for regular physical processes that from the basis of the operation of the clock."[2] The third kind of time is cosmic time. Unlike physical time, where time is limited to local reference frames, cosmic time refers to the measurement of the duration of the whole universe. Fourth, and lastly, is

[1] Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, p. 9-10.

[2] Ibid., 9.

metaphysical time. This is what some philosophers of time call God's time. If God has any "succession" or "duration" to His life, then this would properly be called metaphysical time. Metaphysical time should not be confused with physical time or cosmic time, which requires physical laws and physical processes. Rather, metaphysical time is unique to God. It is God's own time.[3]

Now that some proper distinctions have been made between kinds of time, we shall now turn to the first argument made by the eternalist, that God "in" time is a contradiction. The argument goes something to the effect: Temporalists want to argue that God created time, yet God is within time. Such a statement seems contradictory. Either God came into existence with time or time has always existed. If God created time then He is not a necessary being, since He would have begun to exist with time. On the other hand, if the later is true, then it would seem that God is dependent on something other than Himself for His own existence. Either way, God's necessary existence is denied.

But this kind of argument is a strawman argument against the temporalist view. Temporalists want to make a distinction between God's own time, which is metaphysical time, and created physical time. As Garret DeWeese notes:

> Stating that an entity is metaphysically temporal is to say that it is a temporal entity, but the temporal properties and relations that belong to it are defined with reference to metaphysical and not physical time. What constitutes metaphysical temporality is the same relation and constitutes any other temporality: causation. My suggestion is that the causal succession of mental states in God's conscious life grounds the flow and direction of metaphysical time. And, given that God is creator and sustainer of the contingent order, his causal sustenance of every world will ground the time of that world[4]

[3] Ibid.9-10.

[4] Ibid., 253.

God does not exist "in" created, contingent physical time; rather He has his own metaphysical time, which is grounded in and flows from His own "conscious life." Further, God as Creator and Sustainer of the physical world order brings about the entire space-time ordered-ness by His own causal power. Thus to say that God has His own time is not the same as saying that God is "in" created time.

Further, why think that God is *in* created space anymore than He is *in* created time. Scripture affirms that God is omnipresent. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah wrote "'Am I a God who is near,' declares the Lord, 'And not a God far off? 'Can a man hide himself in hiding places, So I do not see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the Lord."(Jer 23:23-24) Similarly, David, when speaking of God's presence, wrote in Ps 139:7-13:

> Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike [to Thee.] For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb.

But these biblical passages on God's omnipresence do not require that God exist *in* created space-time; rather, God's omnipresence means that God, in the fullness of His being, is present at every place of the created order, not in the sense that God somehow permeates or embodies space-time, as in pantheism or panentheism, but in the sense that He is aware of what is going on in the created order and that He is actively present by sustaining and acting within creation to bring about His own will and purposes.[5]

[5] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 251-253.

Temporalism, Immutability and Divine Act

Scripture often speaks of God performing certain actions. But as was pointed out, for the eternalist, any reference in scripture which speaks of God *acting* in time should be taken metaphorically. But why think that every instance in Scripture which speaks of God acting in the universe is metaphor or anthropomorphic. Against this position, John Feinberg raises the objection:

> What is the evidence that these passages are anthropomorphic? Moreover, what are the criteria for determining that we are dealing with anthropomorphisms? We need answers that admit that some language about God is anthropomorphic and some is not. What Atemporalists must do to discredit the temporalist's biblical evidence is explain what criteria tell them the language is anthropomorphic. No doubt that some will reply that if God is an immaterial being, he doesn't have a literal voice box with which to speak, nor can he lead Israel out of Egypt with a literal hand, because he has none. Both temporalists and Atemporalists would agree that such language is anthropomorphic or metaphorical, but the temporalists should add, don't be confused by the "surface grammar" of these sentences. God cannot lead Israel out of Egypt with a literal hand, but don't think that means God can't do the act at all. God is acting, and temporalists want to know how God can know when to act at the right time, if God is atemporal.[6]

As Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests, the burden of proof is on the eternalist to show that such actions are indeed metaphorical:

> Scripture pervasively represents God as having a history of action, knowledge and response. The eternalist argues that Scripture's representation of God as having a history must not be taken as literally true. The person who accepts Scripture as canonical will concede, in advance, that the eternalist might just possibly have good reason for this view; after all, everybody who accepts Scripture as canonical thinks that certain aspects of how Scripture represents God should not be taken as literally true. However, the burden of proof lies on the eternalist; in general it's the case, if one takes Scripture as canonical, that the burden of proof lies on the person who holds that in some particular respect Scripture's representation of God is not to be taken as literally true.[7]

Scripture affirms that God has a history, and this is no more clearly seen than in life of Jesus. According to Wolterstorff, any consideration on the doctrine of divine action must

---

[6] John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 406-407.

[7] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Response to Paul Helm" In *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70.

take into consideration that the Second Person of the trinity, the divine Son of God, "became flesh."[8]

> The actions of Jesus were not simply human actions brought about by God, plus human actions freely performed by Jesus in situations brought about by God; they were God's actions. In the life and deeds of Jesus it was God who dwelt among us. The narrative of the history of Jesus is not just a narrative concerning events in the history of the relationship of a human being to God; it's a narrative about God. God does have a history; the doctrine of the incarnation implies that the history of Jesus is the history of God.[9]

Moreover, if we are to seriously take into consideration that in the incarnation God the Son entered into our space-time existence, "becoming flesh" and "dwelling" among us, then God's own temporal mode of existence must be such that He can enter into our space-time universe without somehow becoming enmeshed with it. Thomas Torrance describes the event of the incarnation, whereby God enters into created space-time, as the forging of a "deeper ontological bond" between God's "uncreated time and created time"[10] Torrance goes on to say, "we think of the eternal time of God incarnate as penetrating and embracing the contingent time of our creaturely world thereby giving it features which it does not have merely in virtue of its creaturely nature."[11] Notice Torrance's language, here. He is not saying that God's uncreated time, which is God's eternity, becomes our created time or that the two times are mutated into one time; rather, there is a bond forged between the two distinct, but not dissimilar, times. As was pointed out in chapter two, God the Son's entering into space-time is central for our redemption, and not only for human creaturely redemption, but for the entire created contingent

---

[8] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Unqualified Divine Temporality" In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 209.

[9] Ibid., 210.

[10] Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 50.

[11] Ibid.

universe. But if God's eternality means, as eternalism suggests, that God is atemporal, then it seems impossible for God to enter into space-time, for an absolutely timeless God can experience no temporal succession in His life nor can He have any temporal or spatial extension. Therefore, temporalism makes better sense when considering the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.

Temporalism and Changing Knowledge

As was demonstrated earlier, a defender of divine timelessness, in order maintain her position, would have to acknowledge that God could not know "now" what is taking place in the universe.[12] A timeless God would be limited to tenseless truths. But could not

---

[12] Often philosophers attempt to reconcile God's eternal present with our own present. For instance, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, working from Boethius' definition of eternity and Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (STR), build the case for what they call ET-simultaneity. By ET-simultaneity they mean that God and the universe exist in two separate reference frames, nevertheless, these two reference frames can exist 'simultaneously' or 'at once.' But how? According to Stump and Kretzmann, a timeless being or entity can have no temporal duration in its life. There can be no past and future nor any type of process. Instead an eternal entity possesses all of its life at once. God's present is different than the temporal present. Unlike the temporal present which flees to the past and from the future, God's present is a kind of duration without any kind of succession. They believe that God's eternal present can exist simultaneously with our own present. Working from Einstein's special theory of relativity, Stump and Kretzmann develop an analogy of a train and lightning flashes in order to express how simultaneity occurs between two reference frames. They argue that with the train analogy there are two observers. The first observer is a "ground observer" and the other observer is on the train. The train moves close to the speed of light. While the train is moving it is struck by lightening twice, once at each end of the train. The ground observer sees the lightening strikes as if both lightening bolts hit the train simultaneously while the train observer, because he is moving toward the light, sees the lightening bolts in a before and after sequence. In this case there are two observers, one from an eternal reference frame while the other from a temporal reference frame. Because there are no privileged observers, then we can see here that what God sees to be simultaneous is in actuality temporal for us. [Stump and Kretzmann, Eternity, 429-433.]

However, there are numerous difficulties with Stump and Kretzmann's view of ET-simultaneity. The fundamental problem is how a temporal event can "be wholly present" to a being that has all of its life. (Helm, *Eternal God*, 33) Also, Stump and Kretzmann equivocate on the word present. While God experiences a "'present-like' existences," His present radically differs from our own, in that, it is atemporal and not in any way part of our own temporal system. (Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 69.) One other problem that arises is that for God to know now what is occurring in the universe would render Him as temporal because God's consciousness would change from event to event. (John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 412.)

Brian Leftow attempts to salvage Stump and Kretzmann's ET-simultaneity by promoting his own theory of simultaneity. There are two basic prongs to Leftow's view. First, he suggests that temporal objects somehow exists paradoxically both temporally and eternally. The second part to Leftow's theory is what he calls, the "Zero Thesis." The Zero Thesis proposes that because God is spaceless, there is no

the eternalist turn the above argument around and argue that a temporal God could not be omniscient because, being temporal necessitates God's knowledge of certain facts changing and that if God's knowledge of facts changes, He could not be omniscient? What shall be argued below is that the eternalist has made an equivocation on the word knowledge. Perhaps we can make a distinction between kinds of knowledge? But before going on, the question remains whether a Christian theist can reconcile temporalism with divine foreknowledge? One could elude the divine temporal-foreknowledge problem by endorsing middle knowledge.[13] Helm rejects middle knowledge as a way to reconcile temporalism and divine foreknowledge because, given the nature of indeterministically freewill, there could be no future counterfactuals.[14] He concurs with William Hasker that if God does not determine the future then "God's omniscience is limited by what is knowable. If Jones is indeterministically free, then it is not knowable, either to God or to us or to any other observer, what Jones will do when, in a given set of circumstances, he

---

distance between Him and his creation. See Brian Leftow, "Eternity and Simultaneity," in *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 8 No 2 (April 1991), 148-179; and Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 222- 228. Leftow improves Stump and Kretzmann's theory of ET-simultaneity; nevertheless, his theory has difficulties of its own. While he claims his theory does not resort to a B-theory of time, it is hard to see how a temporal entity exists both in time and in eternity without a B-theory of time. For something to exist in eternity, necessitates that it be changeless, even if one were to make a distinction between God as eternal and that which exists in eternity. But, as we have seen an A-theory of time best explains the nature of the universe. See William Lane Craig, "Special Theory of Relativity and Divine Eternity," in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 11 No. 1 (January 1994), 30-31.

[13] 'Middle knowledge" was a concept developed by Luis Molina during the Counter-Reformation. According, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, there are three stages to God's knowledge. First God has "natural knowledge." Natural knowledge consists of God's ability to know all possible worlds. Beyond God's ability to know all possible worlds, God has middle knowledge, which refers to God's ability to "logically prior" to His decree to create, what would obtain in any possible word that He might create. Lastly, God has "free knowledge." Free knowledge is God's foreknowledge of the actual world. [J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, 521-522.]

[14] Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 60.

is confronted with a choice."[15] But Helm's objection rests on the faulty assumption that all proponents of middle knowledge are libertarians.[16] Could one not be a compatabilist and yet adhere to middle knowledge?

John Feinberg, points out that scripture portrays God as "deciding to create," which was worked out in accordance with the counsel of God's will.[17]

> But, wouldn't God foreknow that he would create and foreknow which world it would be? As already stated, divine omniscience means, among other things, that God only knows what can be known. Until God decided to create and chose to actualize a particular possible world, there was nothing to know about whether and what he would create. Does this mean that once God made the decision, he came to know something he hadn't known before? Yes, but this is only damaging to omniscience and immutability if what he came to know was information available before he came to know it. God could be aware of all the possibilities open to him in advance of choosing any of them, but until he decided to create a world and which one to create, he could not know whether he would create, and if he would, which possible world he would create.[18]

So, if God has middle knowledge, then it seems that He has all possibilities available to His knowledge. Before God's decision to create; however, as Feinberg recognizes, there was nothing to foreknow. It is only when God decides to create that He gains foreknowledge of what will become actualized. Feinberg's discussion on middle knowledge will aid what follows in making a distinction between types of knowledge.

In considering types of knowledge we can make a distinction between "content" and "relational" kinds of knowledge. If omniscience is an essential property for God to

---

[15] Ibid., 61.

[16] Ibid., 67; Here, we shall concede to Helm's point that if humans are indeterministically free, then no one, including God, could know what they might choose. As I noted in chapter two, Helm's argument rests on the faulty assumption that statements about the future are neither true nor false. For now, all we need to show is that there is an alternative view of middle knowledge which is not libertarian in nature. For instance, John Feinberg holds to divine middle knowledge and remains, like Helm, a compatabilist. The burden of proof is on the eternalists to show that Middle knowledge could not work within the compatabilist's system. See Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 747-742.

[17] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 313.

[18] Ibid., 113-114.

have, then God is omniscient necessarily. There is no possible world in which God exists that He would not be omniscient. Further, the kind of knowledge that God must have in all possible worlds, i.e., knowledge that is essential to His being, we can call "content knowledge" or "essential knowledge." The second kind of knowledge is "relational" knowledge. By relational knowledge, we are here speaking of a kind of knowledge that is contingent. It is contingent because it is knowledge that is non-essential for God to have. God could have been happily content prior to creation to exist in intra-Trinitarian fellowship. God did not have to create the world that exists, but chose to create it. Now the kind of world that God created was not anything new to his content knowledge. For instance, we could say that God knows that if He creates World w*'*, then such a world would contain Person *p*. God also knows that at Time *t'* Smith mows his lawn. We can concede with an atemporalist that prior to creation God could know all facts tenselessly. He knows them essentially. However, when God creates, all that He intends to create becomes actualized, and because God's creation becomes actualized, the way in which God knows the content of His knowledge changes. He has not ceased to know those objects which have become actualized; rather, He knows them relationally. Therefore, not only can we say that God knows Smith mows His lawn on August 15, 1979 at 5:35 p.m. (tenselessly), but we can also say that God knew Smith mowed his lawn on August 15, 1979 (tensed). God's *tensed* knowledge is contingent and was unnecessary for God to have, but, since God has entered into a new relation with creation, all knowledge of the temporal world becomes part of God's knowledge. An analogy may help to clarify the difference between "content" knowledge and "relational" knowledge.

Suppose that Ziggy has the special ability to predict the future. Every time that Ziggy experiences a tingling sensation behind his left ear he knows that whatever pops into his mind at that particular point will inevitably come true. It is much like Spiderman's "spidey sense" when danger is lurking around the corner. Let us say that Ziggy feels that tingling sensation behind his left ear and immediately a black cat running through his hallway pops into his mind. Unbeknown to Ziggy, his wife picked up a stray cat and is on the way home. After having the vision, Ziggy decided to take a nap. When he wakes up, he walks toward his kitchen and, low and behold, he sees a black cat running through his hallway.

This analogy is limited because Ziggy, as a finite being has limited knowledge, unlike God who has all possibilities available to Him. However, the point of the analogy is that something in the mind is completely distinct from that thing being actualized. That which is in the mind of God is actualized when God creates. It is not that the content of God's knowledge has changed nor has those properties that makes God essentially and necessarily omniscient have changed, but only that God has entered into a relational change with creation in regards to His knowledge. The relational changes that have taken place are not forced upon God, rather these relational changes occur from God's own free choice to create and to actualize the contents of His knowledge and to reveal Himself.

One other argument which demonstrates that God has contingent knowledge is based on Trinitarian fellowship and divine consciousness. If God is timeless, then it seems that God could not change in consciousness because to change in consciousness would mean that God is temporal. John Feinberg explains:

> If all members of the Trinity are equally omniscient (and they are), and there is no possibility of sequence in what any of them consciously thinks, then all three always have the same

> thought they have always been thinking and always think exactly what the other two members are thinking.[19]

Are there distinctions in God's knowledge? Could God the Son know that He is distinct from the Father yet one with the Father or that He is distinct from the Spirit and yet one with the Spirit? What about the statements in Scripture such as Jesus' high priestly prayer where Jesus claims: "[a]nd now glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was (John 17:5)." We see here that the Son has direct awareness of the Father and wants to experience the same glory they shared before the world began. Perhaps we can say that God knows the following proposition: in *30 A.D. the Son incarnate utters a desire to return to His Father with the same glory they once shared*. This is a tenseless statement. God knows tenselessly prior to creation that the Son utters such and such a statement on 30 A.D. However, because the Son is incarnate, the Son, at least the Son *qua* man knows 'now' that He utters such a statement toward the Father. The problem with this is that the Son *qua* man was not with the Father prior to incarnation. If we consider God to be *a se* then God could have chosen not to have created a world in which He became incarnate. The human nature is an accidental property and is not ontologically necessary for God the Son to have. But because God decided to create the kind of *w'* that He created, then such a world would include the Son's being incarnate at *t'* uttering His desire to be glorified with the same glory He shared with the Father before the world began. Thus, if the Son experiences no change in consciousness, then, it would seem that Scripture's speaking of the Son's longing to be reunited with His Father in the same glory they shared before the world was would make no sense. One could escape this by claiming that the Son timelessly has this longing to be

[19] John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 430.

reunited with the Father in the same glory, but this too, does not seem to make sense. Why would the Son make such a statement? As Philippians 2:7 claims, the Son "emptied" Himself of His glory. One can only empty oneself through conscious efforts to do so. The Son's decision to empty Himself and to become a servant by adding on flesh was not a sole act of the Son. The Son's decision was not apart from the Father nor was it apart from the Spirit; rather, it was the plan of the entire Godhead. We have here in the Son, God's self-condescension in taking on human flesh, dwelling among men and becoming a servant.

Two Model of God's Temporal Mode of Existence:

Relative Timelessness

The first model we shall examine, God as "relative timelessness," is advocated by Alan Padgett. According to Padgett, there are some problems with the "everlasting" view. The main problem with the everlasting view, claims Padgett, is theological inadequacy. He believes that this view is the one most straightforward with Scripture; however, one area it neglects is God's transcendence from time. In light of modern scientific discoveries, along with the Biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, it seems that time, along with the rest of the universe came into existence through a definite beginning. Padgett believes that any view on eternity must distinguish God the Creator from the creation. [20] He is the "infinite Creator of all things, including time itself. God should in

[20] Alan Padgett, *Eternity as Relative Timelessness,* in *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 93-94.

some way transcend time."[21]

Despite the shortcomings of the everlasting view, Padgett thinks that atemporality has several problems of its own. One problem is that there can be no such thing as libertarian free will. If the timeless view is correct, then God determines all things. Secondly, in order to maintain the divine timelessness view, one must hold to a B-theory of time.[22]

As far as relative timelessness is concerned, there are two important aspects to Padgett's theory. First, God is the Ground of time. What Padgett means by this is that God could have existed timelessly within a timeless world. However, the kind of life that God has chosen is a life that is dynamic and changing and such a life is the ground of our own temporal world.[23] Padgett clarifies:

> I have suggested that we understand time to be the dimension of the possibility of change. This dimension, like space, is a creation of God's. The world could have been different. God's choice (eternally) to live a certain kind of life, a temporal and changing life, is the ground of time. Time need not have been in God's creation.[24]

By "changing," Padgett does not mean that God changes in His divine nature, character, or perfections. He affirms God's immutability in those areas; rather, any change is a change in God's activity toward a temporal and changing world in which He sustains.[25]

The second aspect to Padgett's theory is that God is the Lord over time. God is completely in control of what transpires in His creation. Nothing takes place apart from God's perfect power, knowledge and will. Moreover, God sustains the world through

---

[21] Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time.* 122.

[22] Padgett, *Eternity as Relative Timelessness*, 95.

[23] Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 122-123.

[24] Ibid., 123.

[25] Ibid. 124.

constant sustaining power, without which the world would cease to exist. God is not bound by time nor is He bound by those imperfections that are a part of time, yet He can act within time without any restraints.[26] Now that these two central aspects have been examined, let us turn to Padgett's definition of relative timelessness.

To say that God's eternity is relative timelessness means that there is no measure to God's time. Padgett's own use of the word "timelessness" differs from that of eternalism. Timelessness in the strictest sense means that something lacks "both temporal extension and temporal location."[27] But this is not what Padgett means when he refers to God's relative timelessness. Padgett distinguishes between "time as pure duration" and time as "the measurement of change." [28] "Measured time" is relative to individual reference frames. This kind of time depends on the laws of nature and can be measured by instruments, such as clocks. But God, on the other hand, transcends "measured time", since He is the Creator of space-time. He cannot be subjected to the Laws of Nature, i.e., "He does not conform to any order of nature that would cause him to repeat the same process over and over again in a uniform manner, as an isochronic clock is supposed to do."[29] The Laws of Nature can be changed and altered, since they are contingent and dependent on God for their existence.[30] On the other hand, "relative timelessness", suggests Padgett "attends to the intuition that God cannot be 'contained' within any

---

[26] Ibid., 123-125.

[27] Padgett, *Eternity as Relative Timelessness*, 105.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time,* 127.

[30] Ibid.

created category."[31] God's time is not created in the same sense as "measured time" nor is it "made at any time."[32] Rather, "God is the metaphysical precondition" for His own temporal mode of existence, His own eternity which is relative timelessness, i.e., pure duration.[33] On his notion of "relative timelessness" Padgett claims:

> God's time is infinite, but it is also immeasurable. . . . In other words, God is timeless *relative* to created time of our space-time universe. . . .any temporal measure depends on the laws of nature (which in turn depend on the created structures and regularities of natural objects). Temporal metrics are relative to inertial frames of reference; they change with strong gravity or great speed. There is no reason to assume that such metrics apply to God.[34]

Thus God as the Creator of space-time is not a part of physical measured space-time. God's own eternity is grounded in and ontologically dependent on God's own life and Being.

The Two-Phase View

The second view we are concerned with is (what I shall call) the "Two-phase view."[35] According to Craig, if God is timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation, then there must be two phases to God's life: one timeless and one temporal. At the moment God creates He enters into a dynamic relationship to creation.[36] Craig claims:

---

[31] Padgett, *Eternity as Relative Timelessness*, 105.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 106-107.

[34] Ibid., 107.

[35] Thomas Senor advocates a similar view, which he calls "accidental temporalism." See Thomas Senor, "Divine Temporality and Creation Ex Nihilo." In *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 10 No. 1 (January 1993), 87.

[36] Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 218-233.

> It seems to me, therefore, that it is not only coherent but also plausible that God exiting changelessly alone without creation is timeless and that He enters time at the moment of creation in virtue of his real relation to the temporal universe. The image of God existing idly before creation is just that: a figment of the imagination. Given that time began to exist, the most plausible view of God's relationship to time is that He is timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation. [37]

If God is temporal *sans* creation, then how are we to understand God's temporality? Given the nature of the expanding universe and that time is moving unidirectionally, it is possible that there is, based on General Relativity Theory, one overarching reference frame. This reference frame is what Craig calls "cosmic time." [38] He asserts: "[t]hus, not only do we know that a privileged cosmic time in which the universe evolves exists, but because the earth is approximately at rest with respect to our galactic fundamental particle, we also have a fair idea of what time is!"[39] Craig believes that "cosmic time" is the measurement of God's "metaphysical" or "ontological" time. The reason for this is that since creation those movements which occur in cosmic time "coincide with the moments of metaphysical time."[40] He asserts:

> From God's perspective in real, A-series time, there is an absolute present in which He is now conscious of what is happening in the universe, and He is now causally sustaining the events in the universe. But if…God's causally sustaining the universe in being is simultaneous with the events being so sustained, then there must be an absolute, cosmic "now" which describes the state of the universe as it is present to God.[41]

Ontological time, which is "real time," claims Craig, proceeds cosmic time and thus has

---

[37] Craig, *Timelessness and Omnitemporality*, 236.

[38] William Lane Craig, *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Philosophical Studies Series vol. 84 (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 217-218.

[39] Ibid., 218.

[40] Ibid., 241.

[41] William Lane Craig, God and Real Time." Religious Studies 26 (1990), <www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/realitme.html> (June 1, 2007), 7.

"its own intrinsic metric."[42] But once God creates the universe, including physical time, the moments of cosmic time begin to coincide with the moments of metaphysical time. While ontological time exists in such a way that it is not bound by the laws and rules of the universe; nevertheless, cosmic time serves as a "clock" to measure God's time.[43] Since God could have chosen not to create, then both cosmic time and ontological time are contingent. God could have been content not to have created, and according to Craig, would have remained timeless.[44] Yet, now that God has created and entered into this temporal causal relationship with creation, He is "omnitemporal", i.e., that God "exists at every time that ever exists." [45]

Relative Timelessness or the Two-Phase View

Both Craig and Padgett present possible options for the defender of divine temporality, but here the question naturally arises: which view is best? Both views take into consideration God's transcendence and immanence. Like eternalism, God is spaceless, i.e., He completely transcends the space-time universe. Further, God is not enmeshed in the physical processes of the created world nor is He bound by the laws of nature. Concerning God's immanence, God is religiously available to His creatures. Not only is God aware of what is going on in the space-time universe, but He can act directly in response to His creatures.

---

[42] Ibid., 9.

[43] Ibid. 10

[44] Ibid.

[45] William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 129-153.

One criticism of the two-phase view is that such a view is incoherent.[46] How can a God who is essentially timeless become temporal? If divine timelessness and absolute immutability entail one another, then would not a God who is timelessly eternal be absolutely immutable? But how can a God who is absolutely immutable change from a state of timelessness to a state of temporality or to even decide to become temporal? An obvious out for Craig is to deny absolute immutability. But if one were to deny absolute immutability, then could it be said that God is timeless?

Another problem with Craig's view is that he wants to say that cosmic time measures God's metaphysical time. The problem with this is that "assumptions are made about how God is in himself based upon how God seems from a limited temporal perspective."[47] But, as Padgett points out, if God exists outside of the universe, then no means of measuring time within our universe can be used to measure God's time. Such would have no meaning for things that exist outside of our space-time universe.

Padgett's view, though, is not without its problems. Craig raises the following objection to immeasurable time:

> Metric conventionalism is the view that there is no objective fact of the matter concerning the comparative lengths of separate temporal intervals. But metric conventionalism does not hold that there really are no intervals of time or that no intervals can be objectively compared with respect to length. . . . For in the case of intervals which are proper parts of other intervals, the proper parts are factually shorter than their encompassing parts.
>
> But this implies that prior to creation God has endured through a beginningless series of longer and longer intervals. In fact we can even say that such a time must be infinite. For the past is finite if and only if there is a first interval of time. (An

[46] DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 270. It should be noted, while DeWeese brings up this objection, he does not, in the end, conclude that Craig's view is incoherent.

[47] Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, 128.

> interval is first if there exists no interval earlier than it, or if there exists no interval greater than t but having the same end point.)[48]

However, Craig misses Padgett's point. Padgett defines "time as the dimension of the possibility of change." Yet, before the first change (B.F.C), it is conceivable to think of God existing prior to creation in an immeasurable time.[49]

> There is, let us say, an unending, nonfinite and immeasurable "time" B.F.C. If you want to call this an "interval," fine, but it is a very odd one! Any division into subintervals is wholly arbitrary; in fact there are no "divisions" in this temporal interval B.F.C.[50]

Thus for Padgett, it is feasible to think of God existing in a kind of temporal state, apart from any change and measure.

Given the above two views, how are we to understand God's temporal modes of existence. I believe the best way is to take a synthetic approach between these two views. Before creation, God exists, as Padgett points out, in an "immeasurable," "nonfinite" state. There is no change until God creates. Yet, at the moment God creates, he enters into a dynamic and active relationship with His creation. Furthermore, the flow of metaphysical time is not based on "cosmic time" but as Garret DeWeese points out, "the causal succession of mental states in God's conscious life grounds the flow and direction of metaphysical time."[51] Yet, according to Garrett DeWeese, no intrinsic metric in metaphysical time may be required. Even if events within the universe are placed on a "'one-to-one' correspondence with moments of metaphysical time, one could give no sense to the statement that a certain duration of metaphysical time lasted a certain number

---

[48] Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 234-235.

[49] Alan Padgett, *Response to William Lane Craig*, In *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 167.

[50] Ibid.

[51] DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 253.

of seconds (days, years, and so on)."[52] However, like Craig, God is omnitemporal, i.e., since creation, God "exists at every time that ever exists."[53]

[52] Ibid.

[53] Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in 153.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was three-fold. First, this thesis sought to examine the theological and philosophical reasons for holding to the doctrine of divine timelessness. We began our study by taking a look at the four primary contributors to the doctrine of divine timelessness within Western culture: Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas. There seems to be at least four prominent features which make up the *sine qua non* of the eternalists position: (1) God is the Greatest Possible Being; (2) It is better to have completeness of life than to exist in parts, i.e., to have one's life exist as a whole; (3) God is the first cause of all things; (4) There is an ontological distinction between an infinite Creator and a finite creation. Given these four principles, we can form the following propositions:

(a) God is the most perfect being
(b) That which is perfect does not change (for change requires existing in parts)
(c) Temporal objects change
(d) A temporal being could not be perfect because such a being would change
(e) Therefore, God is not temporal
(f) Therefore, God is timelessly eternal

Central to the medieval theists' conception of divine timeless were the notions of God as a perfect being, and that a perfect being could not change.

Next we examined Paul Helm defense of the divine timeless view. Helm builds a series of arguments for the coherence of the doctrine of divine timelessness. He argues that only a God that is strongly immutable can do those things attributed to God by scripture and only a timelessly eternal God preserves the doctrine of absolute immutability. We concluded that Helm's view of divine timelessness is coherent, but rests on an understanding of God's absolute immutable.

The second purpose of this study was to determine whether the eternalist has justification for holding to a strong immutability and to see if the doctrine of divine timelessness coheres with other core Christian doctrines. There are at least three ways to understand God's immutability. The first way is to reject immutability altogether. But this view was rejected because scripture affirms that God is immutable. The second way of understanding divine immutability is to say that God can change in no sense. This is the position of eternalism. The eternalist uses the word "strong" to qualify his version of immutability, but it is more fitting to suggest that the eternalist conception of immutability is absolute. For on this view, not only is God unchanging, but he could not ever change in any sense. However, such a conception of the doctrine of immutability seems to negate scriptures affirmation that there are some ways in which God changes, e.g., in His activity. Therefore, we are left with the understanding that God is immutable in some sense. Further, we concluded that God is immutable in His ontological nature or essence, His character, His will, and His divine plan and purposes. Yet, it is God's ontological immutability which makes it possible for God to act in the world and to change in his relationships toward His creatures. Finally, concerning God's immutability, we determined the scriptural concept is more akin to Karl Barth's notion of "constancy." God is constant in His being. He is stable and does not change in His ways.

After examining the doctrine of immutability, we examined two objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness. The first objection focused on the doctrine of creation. If God sustains a temporal creation, and the A-theory of time is true, then He could not be a timeless being, since He would be in a temporal causal relationship with events that are coming into and out of existence. A possible out for the defender of divine timelessness is

to hold to the B-theory of time, i.e., there is no true temporal becoming in the world. All events and episodes are equally real within the four-dimensional space-time manifold. But given the expansion of the universe, the problem of temporal becoming, and an inconsistency between the doctrines of creation and divine omnipotence and the B-theory of time, there is reason to reject eternalism's employment of the B-theory. The second objection observed was an argument from the incarnation of the Son of God. We concluded that Scripture and the early Fathers held that the Son of God, through the incarnation, entered into space-time and that whatever it means to say that God is eternal, that understanding must include such a possibility as the Son of God's entering into the space-time universe. Further, we presented a philosophical argument for the Son's temporality. In this argument we showed that the defender of divine timelessness must hold to either a form of Nestorianism or Adoptionism in order to justify the doctrine of divine timelessness with the incarnation.

The third purpose of this study was to make an attempt at formulating a coherent understanding of God's temporal mode of existence. Two views were examined: God as "Relative Timelessness" and the "Two-phase view." We concluded that a synthesis position between Relative Timelessness and Omnitemporality best explains God's temporal mode of existence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith.* Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 199-314.

Anselm. "Monologium" in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 5-81.

_____. "Proslogium" in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 82-104.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One.* trans. by Anton C. Pegis. Doubleday and Co, 1955: University of Notre Dame Press edition 1975.

_____. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two.* trans. by James F. Anderson. Doubleday and Co, 1955: University of Notre Dame Press edition 1975.

_____. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two.* trans. by Vernon J. Bourke. Doubleday and Co, 1955: University of Notre Dame Press edition 1975.

_____. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book 4*. trans. by Charles J. O'Neil. Doubleday and Co, 1957: University of Notre Dame Press edition 1975.

_____. *Summa Theologica*, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 31-67.

Augustine. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Translated by John K. Ryan. New York: Image, 1960.

Augustus Hopkins Strong. *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1912.

Barrow, John D. and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Principle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Beasley-Murray, George, R. *John. Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36*, Waco: Word Books, 1987.

Bettenson, Henry and Chris Maunder eds. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. Oxford: University Press, 1999.

Bloesch, Donald G. *God the Almighty: Christian Foundations*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Blount, Douglas K. "On the Incarnation of a Timeless God." In *God and Time*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 244.

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V: VI., trans. by V. E. Watts. New York: Penguin, 1969.

Borchert, Gerald L. *John 1-11: The New American Commentary, Vol. 25A.* ed. E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996.

Craig, William Lane. *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*. Philosophical Studies Series vol. 84. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

_____. *The Only Wise God*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987.

_____. *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time.* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001.

_____. "Response to Paul Helm." In *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory Ganssle Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

_____. "Timelessness and Omnitemporality" *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, Vol. w, No. 1, 2000, pp. 29-33.

Cullmann, Oscar. *Christ and Time*. Translated by Floyd V. Filson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, nd.).

Davies, Paul. *God and the New Physics.* New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1983.

_____. *The Mind of God*. New York: Touchstone, 1992.

DeWeese, Garret. *God and the Nature of Time*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

_____. *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Feinberg, John S. *No One Like Him.* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001.

Frame, John M. *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing , 2001.

Hasker, William. "A Philosophical Perspective," In *The Openness of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 127-154.

_____. *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Helm, Paul. "Divine Timeless Eternity." In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle. Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

_____. *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

_____., *Eternalism Contra Craig*, <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2008/01/eternalism-contra-craig.html> (April 3, 2008).

_____. *Faith and Understanding*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

_____. "God Does Not Take Risk," In *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*. eds. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon. Malden: Blackwell, 2004, 228-238.

_____. "God and Spacelessness," In *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,* eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 99-110.

_____. "Is God Bound by Time" In *God Under Fire*, eds. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. 120-135.

_____. "Response to William Lane Craig," In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle. Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press. 2001. 161.

_____. *The Providence of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

_____."Timelessness and Foreknowledge" In *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 84, No. 336. October, 1975.

Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 5th rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

Leftow, Brian. “A Timeless God Incarnate” In *The Incarnation*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 273-299.

_____. “Eternity and Simultaneity.” In *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 8 No 2 (April 1991), 148-179.

_____. *Time and Eternity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Leo the Great, *Letters XXVIII. IV.* Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 40-41.

McTaggart, J. M. E. “What is Time? What is Space?” In *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, eds. Peter Van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman. Malden: Blackwell. 2004, 67-74.

Morris, Thomas V. *Our Idea of God.* Vancouver: Regent Press, 1991.

Nash, Ronald H. *The Concept of God.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, II. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 611-644.

Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*

Padgett, Alan G. “Eternity as Relative Timelessness.” In *Four Views on God and Time.” Ed.* Gregory Ganssle, 92-110. Grand Rapids: Downers Grove, 2001, 92-110.

_____. *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992. 165-169.

_____. *Response to William Lane Craig*, In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

_____. *Science and the Study of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Pinnock, Clark, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, David Basinger. *The Openness of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Pike, Nelson. *God and Timelessness.* New York: Schocken Books, 1970.

Poe, Harry Lee. “The Problem of Time in biblical Perspective.” In *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley. Waco: Baylor University, 2005.

Pokinghorne, John. *Time in Physics and Theology.* In *What God Knows: Time, Eternity,*

and Divine Knowledge, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley. Waco: Baylor University, 2005.

Prior, Arthur N. "The Formalities of Omniscience," In *Papers on Time and Tense*. New York: Oxford Press, 1968.

Richards, Jay Wesley. *The Untamed God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Ross, James F. "Creation II," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 119.

Ross, Hugh. *Beyond the Cosmos: The Extra-Dimensionality of God*. 2nd ed. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999.

_____. *The Creator and the Cosmos*, revised ed. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995.

Ryrie, Charles C. *Basic Theology*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999.

Senor, Thomas. "Divine Temporality and Creation Ex Nihilo." In *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 10 No. 1 (January 1993), 86-92.

_____. "Incarnation and Timelessness." In *Faith and Philosophy* Vo. 7. No. 2 (April 1990), 149-164.

_____. "Incarnation, Timelessness, and Leibniz's Law Problems," In *God and Time*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 220-235.

_____. "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation" In *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 24, No. 1 (January 2007), 52-71.

Schroeder, Gerald L. *The Science of God*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.

_____. *Genesis and the Big Bang*. New York: Bantam Books, 1992.

Schippers, Reinier ."πληρόω," In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 1, gen. ed. Colin Brown, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 733-741.

Smart, J. J. C. "The Space-Time World: an Excerpt from Philosophy and Scientific Realism." In *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Peter Van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman eds. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

Stannard, Russell. "On the Developing Scientific Understanding of Time" In *What God Knows: Time, Eternity, and Divine Knowledge*, eds. Harry Lee Poe and J. Stanley. Waco: Baylor University, 2005, 47-60.

Stump, Eleonore and Norman Kretzmann. "Eternity." *The Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 78, No. 8 (Aug., 1981), 429-458.

Swinburne, Richard. *The Coherence of Theism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

_____. *The Christian God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks.* Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 65-83.

Theophilus, *Theophilus to Autlycus.* Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers. 89-121.

Torrance, Thomas F. *Space, Time and Incarnation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969. Reprint, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1997.

_____. *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980.

_____. *Theological and Natural Science*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Wilson, R. McL. *Colossians and Philemon: The International Critical Commentary*. G. I. Davies and G. N. Stanton Gen. eds. New York: T &T Clark International, 2005.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas, "God Everlasting," In *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 77-98.

_____. "Response to Paul Helm" In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 69-78.

_____. "Unqualified Divine Temporality" In *God and Time: Four Views,* ed. Gregory Ganssle (Downers Gove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 187-213.

Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. 1st ed. 1986. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1989.

Zimmerman, Laura. "God and Time" Ph. D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, Department of Philosophy, 1983.