

## **Rescuing the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry: God and Time as a Test Case of Syncretism**

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### **Introduction**

Our Father-God desires that we strip the core truths of the Gospel from Western culture's husk<sup>1</sup> and cleanse them from any syncretistic impurities in the core message. Only then can the purified, inner, life-giving seed (Lk 8:11) be re-contextualized into understandable forms in order to flourish in every other ethno-linguistic group on earth (Jn 1:11-12; see 1 Cor 9:19-23).<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the biblical doctrine of Father-God is at the very core of that Gospel seed we are called to sow (1 Pet 1:23; Jn 17:1-3). The Bible also teaches that knowing Father-God comes by the "ordinary means" of clear Scripture because knowing him is "necessary . . . for salvation" (WCF 1.7; Jn 14:6, 17:3). Certainly, not every passage is as clear as every other, but clear passages must interpret any unclear

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<sup>1</sup>I reject C. G. A. von Harnack's "Hellenization Thesis" that early Christian culture was completely perverted by Greek thought through adopting Hellenistic philosophy clothed in Christianized terms. However, refuting it is actually tangential to its purpose and beyond its scope. Few today hold to this thesis any more as Wilken observes: "The notion that the development of early Christian thought represented a Hellenization of Christianity has outlived its usefulness . . . a more apt expression would be the Christianization of Hellenism, though that phrase does not capture the originality of Christian thought nor the debt owed to Jewish ways of thinking and to the Jewish Bible." Instead, as he writes further, the history of dogma describes the "Christianization of Hellenism" and not the "Hellenization of Christianity." However, few would deny that in this Christianization process, there was a lot of syncretism with instead of transformation of the Hellenic worldview. That for me is the key issue. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xvi.

<sup>2</sup>I will be using "syncretism" as a synonym for mixture: Mixing core biblical truths with those of an unbelieving culture and mixing the peripheral forms of one culture with that of another. Scripture is clear that we are not to mix the core truths of the Gospel (e.g., 1 Cor 1-3; Col 2) with that of the idolatry and worldview of the gentile peoples/nations. Neither should we to mix the external forms of one culture with that of another culture if we are to correctly contextualize that Gospel as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9, if we want to win more people and families for our Lord's Kingdom. Correct contextualization means that believers must possess the core truths of the Gospel within purified, external forms of each of the eth-no-cultures of the earth.

pericope (e.g., WCF 1.7) without reading into any passage non-biblical, cultural presuppositions. Our minds must be captive to the perspicuous word of God alone as the sole inerrant, interpretative key to Father-God's nature. Scripture alone reveals the clearest witness to his nature. Clear Scripture<sup>3</sup> about who Father-God is, and how he interacts with his adopted family in time and space preempts any culture's religious or philosophical tradition about God especially that of Western or Eastern forms of dualism<sup>4</sup> (along with many others).

In principle, this is why our Lord rebuked the Pharisees: "You nullify the [clear, perspicuous] word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Mt 15:6; see Col 2:22b-23). By this, logically, he must mean, that all religious, philosophical, and scientific traditions must serve and not overthrow the clear teaching of Scripture; or they are worthless (Jer 8:8-9).<sup>5</sup> Why then depend upon the chaff of any culture's alien philosophy not built upon the Christ revealed in Scripture (Col 2:8-9) when we have the seed of the everlasting Word by which to know the true God (Jer 23:28-29)? Believers ought then to continually test any culture's viewpoint on divinity against what Scripture itself teaches without us-

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<sup>3</sup>It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve in depth into a discussion of univocal, equivocal, or analogical language though, of necessity, I will discuss this issue briefly later.

<sup>4</sup>By dualism I mean any philosophy that prioritizes the logical and ethical priority of unity over diversity. I contend throughout that the classic perspective on God has been syncretized by a dualistic emphasis upon divinity being a simple, undivided, unchanging unity that is also outside of all aspects of diverse sequentiality including that of time. Hence divinity is atemporal.

<sup>5</sup>In other words, scientific, philosophical, and religious tradition is ministerial to magisterial Scripture. Classic perspectives on an atemporal deity, I believe, reject the basic principle of biblical interpretation: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly" (WCF 1.9). This is true even though there are remnants of the classic view in that Confession.

ing any extra-biblical philosophical lens to (re)interpret the clear message of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Again, as Jeremiah and Paul state, the goal of biblical faith is that people come to know, understand and be in relationship with the living Father through the Word incarnate (Jer 9:23-24; 1 Cor 1:30-31).

### *God and His Relationship to Time is a Test Case*

I presuppose, then, that Scripture<sup>7</sup> is sufficient for the crucial issue at hand as it is for every other foundational philosophical axiom<sup>8</sup> for human life, faith, and practice.<sup>9</sup> This implies an antithesis *in principle*, as Paul and James claim, between fallen human and demonic philosophy and the philosophy (true wisdom) of God as revealed in Scripture (see e.g., 1 Cor 1:18-25, 3:18-21; Col 2:3, 8-10; 1 Tim 4:1-5; Jas 3:13-18).<sup>10</sup> By au-

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<sup>6</sup>The reason: No one can know and be in relationship with a philosophical abstraction arbitrarily called “God.”

<sup>7</sup>The *sola Scriptura* principle: Scripture is the final authority implying that it is both necessary and sufficient for every foundational principle needed for all of life and practice. In other words, the Bible is not the only source of knowledge but it provides an inerrant framework within which to love and apply wisdom (i.e., philosophy) into mathematics, computer science, economics, sociology, carpentry, origins science, etc. Christ is Lord of all of life was Paul’s answer to the dualists of his day (Col 2:3, 6-10). I would agree with John Frame here, we must approach all things with “something [very] close to biblicism.” John Frame, “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on Sola Scriptura and History in Theological Method,” in *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 567-601).

<sup>8</sup>I will use the terms “axioms,” “presuppositions,” and “assumptions” as synonyms. Each fundamental presupposition derived from Scripture must however, be warranted as unmistakable and irresistible so that the opposite is impossible. For example, “there is no truth” is incoherent because it is self-contradictory. Truth therefore exists. The metaphysical principles of logic are of the same species. To deny them is to use them to attempt to overthrow their validity. See Mark R. Kreitzer, “Toward a Biblical Philosophy of Science,” *Christianity and Society: The Biannual Journal of the Kuyper Foundation*, 17/2 (Winter 2007):6-19 for a discussion.

<sup>9</sup>In this essay I am seeking to stand upon the shoulders of neo-Calvinian giants such as A. Kuyper, H. Dooyeweerd, A. Wolters, C.A. Van Til, John Frame, G. Bahnsen, N. Wolterstorff, and Alvin Plantinga. Though, of course, they will not agree with all I am doing here in their names.

<sup>10</sup>Gregory Ganssle believes that while the Scripture gives guidelines for this issue, within these parameters various positions are possible including the atemporal position. He believes that both an atemporal view as well as a temporalist position are “rooted in Scripture.” I will attempt to disprove this assertion from Scripture. Therefore, I certainly disagree that “determining which position is most adequate takes us beyond the particular data of the Scriptures. We will have to think philosophically while remaining in the bounds of Scripture.” Gregory E. Ganssle, “Introduction: Thinking about God and Time,” in *God and Time: Four Views* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 9-27, see 11.

tonomous human reason, no one comes to understand or know the true God (1 Cor 1:21). Scripture alone thus possesses a perspicuous framework<sup>11</sup> within which each culture can construct a doctrine of “our Father” (Mt 6:9b). God and his relationship to time is merely a *test case* in this over-arching issue. We must never set aside the clear teaching of Scripture because we know that “God is really not like that” (see e.g., Gen 3:1-7). Our Lord implied that spiritual blindness results in reading Scripture through any pre-understanding other than the foundational axioms derived from the clear Word of God (Mt 15:13-14). Syncretism, thus, is deadly.

For example, Western ethno-theologies can correctly point out the syncretistic wood-chips in the eyes of other ethnic theologies, but are often blind to the syncretistic log protruding from their own eyes. This leads us directly again to the exegetical necessity of the Pauline antithesis – human wisdom not founded upon Christ is antithetical to the wisdom of God and is foolishness in his eyes (1 Cor 3:18-21a). In context, Paul’s critique was a prophetic warning against syncretism with Greek dualist philosophy not built exclusively upon Christ as the Logos of God as John terms him (Jn 1:1-3, 14; see Col 2:8-9; Heb 1:1-3).<sup>12</sup>

Another preliminary issue needs to be addressed. “If you see me, you see the Father,” Jesus said (Jn 14:1, 4-11, 17:1-5; 1 Jn 2:13c; Lk 10:22). Knowing and trusting the

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<sup>11</sup>This frame then only needs to be filled out with sound, logical deduction and with general revelation subsumed under the magisterial authority of the inerrant Scripture. Athens must serve Jerusalem: Philosophy built soundly upon Christ himself is ministerial and not magisterial over Scripture.

<sup>12</sup>This does not mean we cannot use Aristotle on logic, for example, but must reform and redirect his ideas according to the wisdom of Scripture as the final authority.

invisible Father comes in the same way that we know and trust the incarnate Son.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, there is a measure of analogy here because the Father is invisible while the Son is visible. Yet there remains a specific element of univocal language in speaking about Father-God. Even the very statement: “No one can make a univocal statement about God” is a univocal statement about God and hence self-contradictory. Logically, then, some univocal statements about God are necessary, true and coherent contrary to the tradition. For example, our Lord himself reasoned univocally from the lesser to the greater, from the broken human image-of-God to the Father whom the image reveals. He taught that just as a human friend and an evil human father can give good gifts to their friends and children, so also does our good, heavenly Father-Friend (Lk 11:5-15).<sup>14</sup> There is an analogy to be sure, but the analogy must possess a specific univocal element to be true.

Some would argue that biblical authors only use analogical (anthropomorphic) language about God and cannot do otherwise. As applied to our topic at hand, they would mean that biblical authors merely make assertions about human experience of time but nothing necessary concerning time and God’s internal Being. Undeniably, again, we know some things about God by analogical comparison with true knowledge of states of

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<sup>13</sup>Biblical faith proclaims that “God is known in Judah” (Ps 76:1; Jer 9:23-24) and that “in Christ,” who is the true Israel, we are able to know the Father (Jn 1:1, 14-18, 4:22, 17:1-3 Heb 1:1-3; Lk 10:22). How he interacts on earth with his Israelite son, and with the Son *par excellence*, thus, reveals quite a bit about how he interacts with the Son before the creation. Otherwise, the Scriptures above are incoherent and we know nothing about Father-God. He revealed his person and manifested his actions with the interpretation of their meaning through the Hebrew prophets. It is through this word, which he gave to the Jews to preserve (Rom 3:1), so that all mankind would be able to come to relationally know him, the true God of all the earth (Jn 17:3).

<sup>14</sup>Other examples are the parables culminating in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15) and the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Lk 18:1-8). In the first, each time the Lord compares his actions in rejoicing with lost rebels coming home to something in the creation either visible or angelic. The joy they experience is his joy as well. However, the last comparison is clearly to the joy of his Father. Jesus compares the joy of the earthly father with the joy of the heavenly Father, who is also interactive with the “[self]-righteous” and the “sinner.” Both fathers have compassion for the lost and dead son now found.

affairs in creational revelation. For example, Scripture claims Father-God sees and hears with eyes and ears, a metaphorical analogy reasoning directly from one aspect of ears and eyes, the ability to see and hear, to God's perceptive ability. However, we know that God cannot have physical ears and eyes because clear passages: "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24) and God is invisible (see Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17), serve as inerrant interpretative keys. .

### Summary and Preview

In summary, of necessity the language about God has analogical aspects because not every Scriptural description about our Father is directly pertinent in a one-to-one application. Further, unquestionably we can never know exhaustive truth about him. Few disagree with this. Yet some aspects of univocity<sup>15</sup> remain otherwise there would be no unambiguous revelation. If there are no univocal elements in an analogy, it becomes mere equivocation (analogy of equivocation), which is meaninglessness.

Second, Scripture ought to be read through philosophical categories derived from Scripture itself.<sup>16</sup> We must never set aside the clear word of God for any ancient or modern tradition to understand God.<sup>17</sup> It is never necessary to use the distorting lenses of extra-biblical philosophy to understand Father-God's revelation about himself.<sup>18</sup> The bur-

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<sup>15</sup>By univocity, I mean possessing a singular ("uni-") meaning and hence unambiguous. Univocity does not imply comprehensiveness because only God has comprehensive knowledge of any single topic.

<sup>16</sup>In other words, the Reformation's *sola Scriptura* principle applied to this topic. God says that he is truth and speaks truth. Therefore, his word can speak clearly and unambiguously. Certainly, again, this does not mean we must have comprehensive knowledge to possess exact, certain knowledge. The very sentence, "No one can have exact [i.e., univocal] knowledge" is incoherent and self-contradictory.

<sup>17</sup>This does not mean, for example, that Paul rejects philosophy, but that philosophical categories, must be redirected and reformed to the glory of God and his word and founded upon Christ. Therefore all philosophy must serve the task of doing exegetically based theology (i.e., the ministerial use).

<sup>18</sup>Of course Christ, the Apostles, and the Prophets use sound deduction from clear Scripture but do not allow reading into Scripture an interpretative key not found in it. When that occurs, Scripture terms it the "teaching of man/people" (e.g., Is 29:13; Mt 15:9; Col 2:8, 22). In other words, sound Protestant her-

den of proof, hence, remains on the one presupposing that clear biblical language about God and time is always analogical and there are no univocal elements. Those holding the tradition must prove that clear Scripture merely describes something about the temporal perceptions of man and states nothing much about the actual interactive ontology within the Godhead.<sup>19</sup>

The exegesis that follows, then, seeks to demonstrate that the exact same language used about a human experience of time is used about God.<sup>20</sup> He is active and interactive in time because Scripture teaches he has a sequential, interactive time-strand within himself. Any other explanation of Scripture seems unnecessary and deceptive as Wolterstorff states:

The biblical writers do not present God as some passive factor within reality but as an agent in it. Further, they present God as acting within human history. The god they present is neither the impassive god of the Oriental nor the non-historical god of the deist. Indeed, so basic to the biblical writings is their speaking of God as agent within history that if one viewed as only an impassive factor

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meneutics is sola Scriptura based and not Scripture plus an interpretative, magisterial key found outside of Scripture (either the scholarly doctors or councils of the churches). In principle, J. I. Packer citing Anglican Father, Thomas Hooker, agrees: "I hold it for a most infallible rule in the exposition of Scripture, that when a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the literal is commonly the worst." Thomas Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V. lix. 2; cited by J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP), 102.

<sup>19</sup>Although God-talk can often be analogical, certain points of exact correspondence of univocity must remain for there to be any coherent meaning. In the absence of intra-biblical interpretative keys indicating otherwise, biblical statements about God ought of necessity to be taken univocally at the points of correspondence as Jesus does by arguing from the lesser to the greater. In other words, we can know something exactly about God though we as creatures cannot have comprehensive knowledge, which is an attribute of God alone. Scripture language about God thus can often be read in a straight-forward way, keeping in mind various analogies that Scripture uses at times. In summary, then, my thesis is that there must be some exact, univocal correspondence between the created experience of time and time within the metaphysical Being of God because the same language is used of both. Our minds must be captive to God's Word alone for interpretative keys because it is God's own self-revelation. Even an analogy must have some basis of univocal comparison with the created world to have meaning at all. The reason is that creation is a reflection of God's Triune nature – that is revelation of the nature of God to be able to understand anything about God at all.

<sup>20</sup>Every figure of speech and every metaphor is understandable based only upon some genuine correspondence between the two terms of the figure of speech. Otherwise the figure is totally incoherent and communicates nothing.

in reality, or as one whose agency does not occur within human history one would have to regard the biblical speech about God as at best one long sequence of metaphors pointing to a reality for which they are singularly inept, and as at worst one long sequence of falsehoods.<sup>21</sup>

In short, this paper discusses crucial presuppositions and definitions concerning God and time, a definition of time as it could possibly apply to the divine nature, and last the substantial biblical evidence for a sempiternal or better an omnitemporal perspective on the relationship of God to time as an antidote to the syncretism of Western views of God.

### **Crucial Foundations and Presuppositions**

First, I presuppose two crucial definitions that philosopher John McTaggart invented concerning the nature of time.<sup>22</sup> The A-series is a tensed view that time is a dynamic rolling transformation from the future, to the momentary present, and on into the past (or vice versa). McTaggart further implies that the A-series is inseparably connected with Presentism,<sup>23</sup> the position that the only time we experience is the present. Consequently, time in this view is a unmistakable and irresistible change in temporal position in the perspective of the person speaking or thinking.

The B-series, on the other hand, is a tenseless view of time as static, relational, and permanent, ordered by two, time-space place relations: “Earlier than some and later

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<sup>21</sup>Wolterstorff, “God everlasting,” 133.

<sup>22</sup>McTaggart denied both the A and B series, believing that time is an illusory phenomena created by human minds. See, J.M.E. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” in *The Philosophy of Time* (eds. Robin Le Poidevin and Murray McBeath; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 23–34. This article is based on J.M.E. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” *Mind*, 17 (1908): 457–73. See also Ned Markosian, “Time,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edward N. Zalta; Spring 2014 edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time/> (accessed 5/14/16).

<sup>23</sup>“We perceive events in time as being present, and those are the only events which we actually perceive.” McTaggart, *ibid.*, 25.



than some other positions.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, some would claim time is like space so that that we live in a four dimensional universe with three spatial and one temporal dimension.<sup>25</sup> The B series by itself seems to imply that all aspects of time, future, present, and past are actually now existing so that someone could move from the future into the past or present and so forth.

Second, a distinction between created physical time (CPT) and divine, metaphysical (i.e., non-physical) time (DMT) is important.<sup>26</sup> Scripture teaches that physical time is contingent and measured by humanity with a created metric based on the sun and the stars (see e.g., Gen 1:14-19). Metaphysical time would then be a necessary, independent diversity, most likely a succession (or sequentiality) within the Creator’s thoughts. As a consequence, DMT, if it exists, and CPT would then be intimately related. CPT would be dependent upon DMT as is everything else in the creation.<sup>27</sup> Garrett DeWeese<sup>28</sup> agrees:

Metaphysical time, roughly, is the succession of moments or events through which concrete objects persist, but since concrete objects need not be material objects, metaphysical time is not identical to physical time. The flow and direction of metaphysical time grounds the ordering relations of physical time.

If God experiences succession in his being, then metaphysical time is “divine time.” . . . It is not necessary that the metric of time derived from any temporal world be applicable to metaphysical time. . . .

The topology of metaphysical time is linear and unidirectional.

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<sup>24</sup>Or “Two days earlier than, one day earlier than, simultaneous with,” and one day later than, and so forth. McTaggart, *ibid.*, 23. See also Markosian, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Markosian, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>See similar discussion, Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series) [*GNT*] (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 9-11.

<sup>27</sup>CPT, like everything else in the creation, is dependent on the Creator. If Scripture teaches the Creator-creature distinction, the total independent aseity of the Creator, and that the creation of necessity must reveal many specific concrete aspects of the glorious nature of the Creator (all of which it does), then what Scripture teaches about the creation in this specific respect could reveal something about the Creator and vice versa. This is indeed, as we shall see, what occurs.

<sup>28</sup>Garrett J. DeWeese, “Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal: God’s Temporal Mode of Being [God’s Temporal Mode],” in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 49-64, see 51.

Therefore, according to a straight-forward reading of Scripture, a single, linear direction applies to CPT (the A series).<sup>29</sup> God is working out his pre-creation plans<sup>30</sup> through the sequence of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. All of creation from the furthest star system to the smallest atom on earth come to consummation at the same time (CPT) when God makes a new heavens and earth as determined by God's plan.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Two Main Relationships of God to Time*

All Christian theologians agree that God is without beginning and without end. The vast majority have held, in addition, that God is *eternal*, existing outside of time. Only a small minority have contended that God is *everlasting*, existing within time. (N. Wolterstorff)<sup>32</sup>

Human founded philosophies are built on one or the other polarity of what philosophers call the One and Many Problem because all such philosophies presuppose a mutually exclusive contradiction and opposition between real unity and true diversity.<sup>33</sup> However, biblical theology and sound logic demonstrate that both God and the universe include within themselves the principle of "equal ultimacy" of true unity and real diversity.

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<sup>29</sup>DeWeese, *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>30</sup>That is within the interactive, true-unity-and-real-diversity of the Godhead.

<sup>31</sup>All of the following passages presuppose a comprehensive movement of created time and space to a predetermined, comprehensive goal of a new heavens and earth (Is 65:17; Acts 17:24-31; Rom 8:28-32; Eph 1:3-14; and 2 Pet 3:3-7). Scripture's teaching about divine foreknowledge and plans before the creation irresistibly imply (i.e., apart from an apriori presupposition to the contrary), that DMT existed before CPT, as we shall see.

<sup>32</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God everlasting," in *Inquiring about God: Volume 1, Selected Essays* (ed. Terence Cuneo; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133-156, see 133.

<sup>33</sup>For an understanding of the One-and-the-Many problem in philosophy and culture, I recommend the following works: See Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*. The 1992 Bampton Lectures (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many, the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn, 1978). See also a briefer introduction in R. J. Rushdoony, "The One and Many Problem — the Contribution of Van Til," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1971), 339-348. Although Rushdoony does not have a degree in philosophical theology, it does not make his thesis untrue. This is a variant of the logical fallacy of "appeal to authority."

C. A. Van Til and his disciples succinctly express this principle as the “equal ultimacy of the One and the Many.” In other words, the Triune God creates and upholds his creation, which is both unified and diverse at the same time, just as he is. The creation irresistibly and inescapably reveals his Triune nature (Rom 1:18-21). This is important as we shall see later.

***First option: God is sempiternal or omnitemporal***

All, of course, agree “that God exists without beginning or end. He never comes into or goes out of existence; rather his existence is permanent.”<sup>34</sup> Yet the brief analysis above yields two possible relationships of God to time. The first is that of an A-Series based, sempiternal God. The term sempiternal applied to God means that he always is everlasting. He is the “God [who] exists throughout all periods of time. . . . [Time is then] an event or sequence of events in the divine consciousness.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, the God-head “experientially has a past, present, and future”<sup>36</sup> within his own tri-une, intercommunicative, internal Being.

Therefore, William Hasker rightly states that the contrast between temporal duration of creatures and the everlasting duration of their Creator is between a creature that is “temporally bounded, [and] having a distinct beginning and perhaps also an ending,” and the Creator who “is boundless [with respect to time], without beginning or end [the Creator].”<sup>37</sup> Oxford Philosopher, Richard Swinburne, agrees:

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<sup>34</sup>William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 34.

<sup>35</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 140.

<sup>36</sup>Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 35.

<sup>37</sup>William Hasker, “The Absence of a Timeless God [“Absence”],” In *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff; Oxford: Oxford University Press,

[When reading Scripture] . . . the simple, naïve,<sup>38</sup> initial view is that God is everlasting. He determines what happens at all periods of time ‘as it happens’ because he exists at all periods of time. He exists now, he has existed at each period of past time, he will exist at each period of past time, he will exist at each period of future time. This is, I believe, the view explicit or implicit in Old and New Testaments and in virtually all the writings of the Fathers of the first three centuries [until Origen and Augustine].<sup>39</sup>

A variant of this viewpoint is that the Triune God is an *omnitemporal* Being in the sense that he is the only necessary Being, who relates to and exists within all types of time.<sup>40</sup> In other words, God possesses a time-strand within himself. As a result of that internal interactivity and sequentiality, the Godhead is able to externally interact with all other forms of time, which he created and upholds.<sup>41</sup>

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2002), 182-206, see 182. Alan Padgett summarizes in: “The Bible knows nothing of a timeless divine eternity in the traditional sense.” *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 33.

<sup>38</sup>Swinburne, I believe,, means “straight-forward” which I am interpreting by the rest of the paragraph to mean an approach to reading Scripture by one not schooled in dualist philosophical conceptions about the Divine.

<sup>39</sup>Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 139. A schismatic variant of what Swinburne considers to be the original viewpoint of the ante-Nicene Christian father is found in Process Theology (PT). In PT God is a temporal God because he is within physical time. The time-space realm is his “body” so to speak. However, this makes divinity merely a contingent and ever-changing god by nature because the creation that is his body is a non-necessary contingent. Otherwise the universe would be everlasting which belies the biblical teaching of creation ex nihilo. Of course, this is not the view of Scripture as all orthodox students agree. Of course, consensus does not make truth, but I will presuppose the process viewpoint on God falls drastically short of the truth.

<sup>40</sup>See DeWeese, *GNT*, 252, whom I follow at this point. He writes, omnitemporal is “an entity that is metaphysically temporal and exists necessarily” [i.e., is a se]. An omnitemporal being necessarily exists in any possible and real sphere of existence (i.e., divinity, and creaturely – both angelic and human). Craig adds the following, which I will also adopt, “God is omnitemporal. He exists at every time that ever exists” (William Lane Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” in *God and Time: Four Views* [ed. Gregory E. Ganssle; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2001], 128-160, see 153).

<sup>41</sup>Greg Ganssle gives an excellent summary of how an omnitemporal Divinity relates to temporality: “God . . . is not in our time but he experiences temporal succession in his being. Our time is constituted by physical time (the kind of time measured in physics). God’s time (metaphysical time) has no intrinsic metric and is constituted purely by the sequence of God’s mental states” (Gregory E. Ganssle, “Introduction,” in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002), 3-20, see 4.

## *Second option: Divine atemporality*

The second option is the classic theological consensus from at least Origen, Augustine, and Boethius until the last several decades, postulating a changeless-atemporal-non-spatial divinity outside and totally independent of time and spatiality. This divinity<sup>42</sup> has no location on a time continuum and no extension (duration) on such a continuum because he/it is totally outside of time.<sup>43</sup> All forms of time are created and changeable phenomena because temporality is not logically possible for a perfect-immutable-simple-

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<sup>42</sup>See, John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God [NOLH]* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology). With a Foreword by Harold O. J. Brown (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 255.

<sup>43</sup>Augustine gives a classic description of an atemporal divinity so that any duration is by definition illogical of such a being, who created all “times”:

“15. But if the roving thought of any one should wander through the images of bygone time, and wonder that You, the God Almighty, and All-creating, and All-sustaining, the Architect of heaven and earth, for innumerable ages refrained from so great a work before You would make it, let him awake and consider that he wonders at false things. For whence could innumerable ages pass by which You did not make, since You are the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by You? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? Since, therefore, You are the Creator of all times, if any time was before You made heaven and earth, why is it said that You refrained from working? For that very time You made, nor could times pass by before You made times. But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What were You doing then? For there was no then when time was not.

16. Nor do You by time precede time; else would You not precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity, You precede all times past, and survive all future times, because they are future, and when they have come they will be past; but “*You are the same, and Your years shall have no end*” [Ps 102:27]. Your years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come, that all may come. All Your years stand at once since they do stand; nor were they when departing excluded by coming years, because they pass not away; but all these of ours shall be when all shall cease to be. Your years are one day, and Your day is not daily, but today; because Your today yields not with tomorrow, for neither does it follow yesterday. Your today is eternity; therefore You begot the Co-eternal, to whom You said, This day have I begotten You. You have made all time; and before all times You are, nor in any time was there not time.” (Augustine, *Confessions* 11.13.15-16; spelling and grammar updated; underlining added for emphasis). <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110111.htm> (accessed 6/6/16).

This brings me to an important point. Stump and Kretzmann, well known advocates of the atemporal position, claim that atemporality defined by Boethius as “illimitable” implies a kind of infinite duration and “absence of succession.” However, duration by any meaning of the word implies persistence in time, therefore if their reading of Boethius is accurate, he contradicts himself and is incoherent. But as Augustine stated, there can be no “then” or “before” – no duration – “when time was not.” Hence, temporality and atemporality are definitional opposites and have no univocal point of connection by which to make a coherent analogy between the two let alone allow any interaction between the two. Second, if “illimitable” means “infinite duration,” then Boethius has syncretized two not mixable concepts. *Contra* Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy [REP]*, s.v., “Eternity.” London/New York: Routledge, 1998. See also Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. “Eternity.” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458.

transcendent Being unless one syncretizes. Time could be seen as a B-Series over which God reigns in his atemporal sphere, contemplating the whole universe at once moving as it were “beneath” him.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the contrast is between the creation, which is “changeable reality” and the “absolute changelessness” of the timeless Being.<sup>45</sup> This is a classic aspect of dualism, which makes unity and diversity dialectical opposites.

Philosopher-theologian Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius provides the most well-known definition: “Then eternity is at once the total and perfect possession of interminable [illimitable] life.”<sup>46</sup> Openness of God theologian, William Hasker correctly summarizes:

The central idea is stunningly simple: whereas we temporal creatures experience our lives spread out in time, moment by moment, the eternal God experiences the

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<sup>44</sup>Of course because the classic view of God is a-spatial, therefore there can be no beneath, above, or beyond. I believe the Scripture would teach that God is spatial – not physical space because God is spirit, but personal spatial because the Father is not the Son, who is not the Spirit, and so forth.

<sup>45</sup>Hasker “Absence,” 182.

<sup>46</sup>“Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis uitae tota simul et perfecta possession.” The relevant passage is from *Consolations of Philosophy* 5.6, <http://www.san.beck.org/Boethius5.html#6> (August 4, 2014; underlining added). The relevant word is interminabilis, which means “not being able to terminate” and which has been translated often as “illimitable” or as here “interminable.” In other words, as the next section specifies, God does not live “in time” so that there is no present, past and future. God’s “entire space of ... life” is not “established in time” and is “embrace[d] at once”:

Then that God is eternal  
is the judgment by the common reason of all peoples.  
Then let us consider what eternity may be;  
for this will make clear to us at once  
divine nature and knowledge.  
Then eternity is at once  
the total and perfect possession of interminable [interminabilis] life.  
This is more clearly evident  
from comparison of the temporal.

For whatever lives in time  
that present proceeds from the past into the future  
and nothing is established in time  
which could embrace at once the entire space of its life,  
but in fact it does not yet apprehend tomorrow  
while it has already lost yesterday;  
in life today too you do not live more fully  
than in that passing and transitory moment..

whole of time all at once, so that nothing of the world's life is "past and gone," and nothing of it is "yet to come"; rather, all is enjoyed at once in the divine Eternal Present.<sup>47</sup>

Many have recently critiqued aspects of this consensus because it developed out of interaction and quite possibly syncretism with neo-Platonic philosophy.<sup>48</sup> Process Theologian, Rem B. Edwards, in my opinion correctly calls it "The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God."<sup>49</sup> Wolterstorff agrees: "The central reason that the

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<sup>47</sup>Hasker, "Absence," 183. Found also in Gregory E. Ganssle; David M. Woodruff. *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (Kindle Locations 3276-3278). Kindle Edition. Douglas Kelly synthesizes that ancient agreement on the eternity of divinity: "As St. Augustine reminds us, time is as much a creature of God as is matter and space for it was only with the creation of the cosmos that time began its flight. Hence, time and space are God's servants not His masters. Justin Martyr said in the second century A.D.: 'God, the Creator of all things is superior to the things that are to be changed' (Justin Martyr, First Apology, ch. xx)." Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology* (Volume 1): *Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church* (Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland, UK, 2008), 212.

<sup>48</sup>Probably Parmenides in his poem, "The Way of Truth": The One "neither was at any time nor will be, since it is now all at once, a single whole," and Plato in the *Timaeus* first discussed the idea of an atemporal divinity in Western philosophy. See e.g., William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960): 87 – 108.

See also Swinburne, *The Christian God*; Padgett, *God, Eternity*, 38-55; DeWeese, "God's Temporal Mode," and *GNT*; Wolterstorff *Inquiring about God*; Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (July 1986): 235-269; Alvin Plantinga, *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (ed. James F. Sennett; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Alvin Plantinga writes: "Many theists, however, hold that God is eternal, and that this eternity involves at least the following two properties. First, his being eternal means that everything is present for him; for him there is no past or future. . . . And, secondly, God's being eternal means that God is atemporal, 'outside of time' – outside of time in such a way that it is in error to say of him that he knew some proposition or other at a time. . . . [T]he truth, instead, is that he knows this proposition eternally. . . ." He continues: "I am inclined to believe that . . . the thesis that God is both atemporal and that everything is present for him—is incoherent" (Plantinga, *Analytic Theist*, 262; Plantinga, "Ockham," 239). I agree.

Certainly this is intuitively obvious. If God is outside of time-sequentiality in a sphere of pure simplicity (i.e., non-diversity), then He has no relation to time-succession and hence cannot know past, present, or future time-diversity at all. The reason is that to an a se-eternal Being no time-sequentiality (i.e., no time-strand) exists within him/itself. Therefore, certainly nothing can be present, past, or future from such a Being's simple perspective. So I disagree at this single point: Not "everything is present" time for him.

To those not blinded by a cultural consensus can see things that those within the consensus cannot grasp. This is why we need an intercultural dialogue on theology and not a monologue of Hellenized Christians imposing their view as the only orthodox view in this specific topic upon other Christianizing cultures. Such a dialogue leads to humility in the place of the imperialistic hubris of Christianized dualist theology.

<sup>49</sup> Rem B. Edwards, "The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God" *Religious Studies*, 14, No. 3 (September 1978): 305-313. Again I utterly reject the view of God in Process Theology but the critique of the classic view of God in this article – with several corrections – is accurate, I believe.

tradition offered for holding that God is timeless . . . is that God must be understood as changeless.”<sup>50</sup>

When one juxtaposes a logically pure form of an atemporalist divinity with a central neo-Platonic presupposition that the One is perfect, changeless, non-present [a-spatial], self-sufficient, simple, impassive [non-suffering], unchanging, and etc., many observers are impressed by the similarities and also the differences, which implies a mixture or syncretism between the two views.<sup>51</sup> Certainly this does not imply that the histor-

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<sup>50</sup>Wolterstorff, “God everlasting,” n. 5; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Unqualified divine temporality,” in *Inquiring about God: Volume 1, Selected Essays* (ed. Terence Cuneo; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 157-181, see 172, n. 8.

Stump and Kretzmann cite passages in the OT and NT (e.g., Mal 3:6; Jn 8:58; and Jas 1:17) as verses indicating “evidence of the biblical conception of eternity.” Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78, No. 8 (August, 1981), 429.

In reply, first, the ever-presentness of Christ as the “I AM” in John 8:58 is instead an argument for temporality as argued in this paper since non-temporality has no interface at all with past, present, or future unless one syncretizes. Second, the God portrayed by Scripture is indeed immutable (see Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Suffering love,” in *Inquiring about God: Volume 1, Selected Essays* (ed. Terence Cuneo; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 182-222, see 191). However, this is an immutability of an unchanging character but not an absolute unchangeable, hard immutability that implies eternity (atemporality) of some classic theists (see discussion in Feinberg, NOLH).

Last, absolute immutability seems most often linked with a God who possesses the aseity of absolute independent sovereignty. An *a se* God, according to this way of thinking in Christian tradition, is thus simple without parts or multiplicity (i.e., an undivided unity) and hence immutable, atemporal, impassible, and a-spatial though in a manner tempered by (syncretized with) what Scripture actually states. Wolterstorff, who agrees that God has a history, concludes that the issue boils down to one thing: “I argued that whether or not God has a history depends, in turn, on whether there is any sort of change in God. Change in God is what is really at issue” (Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Unqualified divine temporality,” 180). I agree in part. However, the issue goes even deeper in my thinking to whether or not there is any real diversity in God. If there is real diversity within the one God, then change being a form of diversity is logically compatible with such true diversity. Now there is true diversity within the unity of God, the true diversity of three persons dwelling within the equal ultimacy and real unity of the Godhead.

<sup>51</sup>Most notable observers for my purposes in this paper are Wolterstorff, Plantinga, and Swinburne, excellent philosophers. Certainly this does not imply that the historic, orthodox Christian movement ever held consistently to a neo-Platonic vision of God as Morrison reminds us: “Process Theology, and . . . the Open View of God, [believe] that the Classical View portrays God as aloof, uncaring, utterly transcendent, unaffected, an absolute King far away. [However] . . . I am struck by the fact that no Christian theologian ever actually portrayed God this way—not Irenaeus, not Augustine, not Aquinas, not Luther or Calvin, not Edwards, not Hodge. . . . Their conclusions were the direct result of their interpretation of Scripture, not Plato's dialogues, however mistaken they may have been as a result of philosophical influences on such . . . . If the ‘classic’ Christian God-concept was as Process advocates caricatured it, then ‘classic’ Christian theologians would not have espoused divine creation, divine providence, miracles, answers to our prayer,



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However, the point of the exegesis of this article is that an atemporalist view is not necessary and most likely syncretizes what the Bible says about the Trinity with what influential forms of ancient philosophy claim about divinity, though it is not the purpose of this paper to prove a historical connection.<sup>53</sup>

### **Defining Time and Applying It to the Divine Being**

Scripture teaches that CPT is a linear phenomenon according to human perspective. God gave the sun, moon, and stars to govern time – for “seasons, days, years” (Gen

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God's love, above all the Incarnation and effective presence of the Holy Spirit.” John D. Morrison, “Review Article, John Feinberg's *No One Like Him*,” *JETS* 46, no. 4 (2003): 699-709, see, 707.

<sup>52</sup>John D. Morrison, “Review Article, John Feinberg's *No One Like Him*,” *JETS* 46, no. 4 (2003): 699-709, see, 707.

<sup>53</sup>Again there is no attempt to claim the Hellenization Thesis here. Those theologians Morrison mentioned did not adopt a thoroughly dualistic theology but merely syncretized with it, in my opinion. Instead, they “Christianized Hellenism.” A more biblical approach, it seems, would be to use terminology based directly upon inference from Scripture. For example the term Trinity was often inferred explicitly by the Latin Church from John 10:31; 1 John 4:7-8 (Vulgate), and other passages. We have only much later worked out some the implications of it, e.g., God is a complex-unity, equal ultimacy of unity and diversity, and so forth. In other words, the idea of aseity does not need to be founded upon simplicity, i.e., an undivided unity. God is *a se* because that is the nature of the complex-unity of the Triune Being as self-sufficient Being, needing nothing outside himself (e.g., Acts 17:25). Let's begin with that orthodox formulation and then work out all the philosophical ramifications and not vice versa as the *sola Scriptura* principle implies, in my opinion.

1:14, 15-18). It thus consists of both true diversity-as-sequentiality and real unity. Furthermore, events happen in successive order. CPT, therefore, “is what keeps everything from happening at once.”<sup>54</sup> Time as sequential diversity is therefore no illusion. It is logical then to think that this is a direct analogy of what happens within God himself? The original, good cosmos reveals God and not vice versa.<sup>55</sup>

Certainly, the earthly system of determining time does not apply to God who dwells in total independence (aseity) as the transcendent and immanent Creator.<sup>56</sup> Scripture does, nevertheless, give us a univocal<sup>57</sup> comparison between God’s genuinely experience of time-as-sequence on earth with his experience of time-in-himself. For example, Psalm 90:4 “For a thousand years in Your sight [time-as-sequence in God’s perspective] Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or *as* a watch in the night [time as sequence in human perspective]” (NAU; see 2 Pet 3:8).<sup>58</sup> Moses here univocally compares one aspect of God (everlasting longevity) to the brief years of man with no hint that God is outside

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<sup>54</sup>Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 13. In other words, time is one of the aspects of true diversity within the universe that is upheld by the Logos-Word of the Father’s power as executed by the Spirit (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17).

<sup>55</sup>A related point is that the Bible itself teaches that Scripture alone interprets Scripture and no extra-biblical *a priori* ought ever to be used as a filter through which a believer must interpret Scripture. Divine undividedness and lack of multiplicity (i.e., a se-simplicity) could be such an *a priori* and, if true, should not to be used to reinterpret the Scriptural God.

Second, God is spirit, but spirit in Scripture is never an undivided simplicity in created beings (angels and demons), or in the divine, uncreated Being. Ultimate spirit is a Being, who exists as the equal ultimacy of unity and diversity. Human spirits also communicate using true unity and real diversity in their verbal-and-body-language interactions because they reflect their Creator.

<sup>56</sup>The Godhead indeed is a se, however, he is not simplicity-without-multiplicity. In other words, He is both true-multiplicity-and-real-unity, or to borrow one of Abraham Kuyper’s terms, he is a “pluriformity.” The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Spirit and so forth is true diversity/multiplicity. God is thus also totally just and totally loving. However, justice is not equal to love or equal to omniscience, etc. as many classic theologians’ doctrine of a se-simplicity illogically posit.

<sup>57</sup>Again, we cannot know comprehensively like God because of the Creator-creature distinction, but we can know some things exactly and unambiguously (i.e., univocally) about God. As stated above, an analogy must have a univocal element to be true otherwise it is incoherent equivocation.

<sup>58</sup>All passage citations from New American Updated (NAU) unless otherwise indicated.

of time and hence timeless. Analogical-equivocation cannot explain this.<sup>59</sup> In other words, a timeless God with no sequential change and earthly time-as-sequence have no unequivocal point of analogy.<sup>60</sup>

This implies that the God of Scripture is both a creating and a redeeming God, who actively engages humanity from DMT in order to make and then to rescue them in CPT from curse of Adam's fall.<sup>61</sup> In doing so, God fully knows what is occurring in human time and space. He interactively knows both each evil we bring upon ourselves

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<sup>59</sup>Hence there are two views of analogy: 1) analogy with at least one univocal element comparing two different objects, and 2) analogy without any univocal element (analogical-equivocation). The second is incoherent.

<sup>60</sup>Stump and Kretzmann, *REP*, s.v., "Eternity," write: "Analogical predication is the traditionally recognized solution to this dilemma, and it is also what is needed for interpreting the description of the eternal. Temporal duration is analogous to temporal duration, enough like temporal duration to make using the term 'duration' helpful, but enough unlike it to mean that the definition of '(temporal) duration' will not apply. Eternal duration is fully actualized duration, not of which is already lost or not yet gained."

Unfortunately, in this article the authors redefine the term "duration" as a "technical" term. For example, they write in the same article: "The philosophers who developed the concept of eternity were using ordinary terms in extraordinary ways in order to express their theoretical notion of an illimitable life possessed completely all at once. ... Serious attempts to show that eternity really is an incoherent concept require showing that the apparent incoherence persists when the technical interpretations of its terms are fully taken into account."

However, this is special pleading as the normal definition of "duration" involves temporality. Atemporal duration, thus, is oxymoronic because atemporal and temporal are contradictories. This again shows that the classic definition of God is an attempt to merge (syncretize) two concepts incapable of logical reconciliation. A more biblical solution, it seems, would be to apply the Pauline antithesis to the doctrine of God and reject the pagan philosophical definition of God and time.

<sup>61</sup>As one reads Scripture, this is how the relationship presents itself, contra Stump and Kretzmann, *REP*, s.v., "Eternity": "Because an eternal entity is atemporal, its life cannot be ordered successively in either of those series [A or B]. Moreover, no temporal entity or event can be past or future with respect to, or earlier or later than, the whole life of an eternal entity, because otherwise the eternal entity would itself be part of a temporal series. But nothing in eternity's absence of successiveness entails that it cannot be characterized by *presentness* or that an eternal entity's cognitive or causal relationship with temporal entities and events cannot be a kind of *simultaneity*. Taking the concept of eternity seriously involves recognizing that it introduces technical senses for several familiar words, including 'now', present', and 'simultaneous with', as well as the present-tense forms of many verbs" (italics in original). ...

This special sort of simultaneity has been called 'ET-simultaneity' (for 'simultaneity between what is eternal and what is temporal')."

An "ET-simultaneity" is possible only by equivocation of terms, which they call "technical senses" – a form of syncretism – but not by any true form of analogy between terms in normal usage. Atemporality by definition means no relation to time including that of duration. Second, "presentness" is again a temporal term and can have no point of contact with an atemporal realm let alone an atemporal divinity in which time in any way, shape, or form does not exist.

and the natural evil Adam’s rebellion precipitated. He alone acts to restore, heal, and redeem – ultimately in the Logos incarnate. This God, as Wolterstorff correctly affirms, is an “everlasting” God who experiences all kinds of uncreated and created time-strands-as-sequentiality, “rather than eternal.”

Consequently, abstractly considered time in human experience is both “before-ness” and “afterness” with “nowness” occurring at the interface between the two.<sup>62</sup> As Swinburne mentioned earlier, a “naïve” or straightforward reading of Scripture sees this in the following ways: To Father and the Lord Jesus belongs all glory “before all the ages, also now, and unto future ages” [πρὸ παντὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας] (Jude 25, my translation). Here again, there must be time “before” the CPT else the preposition has no meaning.<sup>63</sup> “Before” certainly implies time-before-cosmic-time because without any everlasting time-sequentiality there can be no “before” cosmic time began (or for that matter no “now” or “after” in at all).<sup>64</sup> The “before” must imply a time-strand/time-sequentiality within the Godhead (DMT). In other words, even for God the

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<sup>62</sup>I.e., in my opinion, though I won’t defend it, the reality of a rolling A-Series presentism is foundational to the ability to think in a B-Series. “Presentism is the thesis that only the present is real,” according to Crisp. This means, I add, that not even God can look down upon the past, present, and future as all occurring at once in a fully-transcendent perspective and outside of all spatiality and time. “The opposite view is eternalism or four-dimensionalism, the thesis that reality consists of past, present, and future entities” [i.e., existing all at the same time] (Thomas M. Crisp, “Presentism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 213-245, see 213.

<sup>63</sup>Contra Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 19.

<sup>64</sup>Contra Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 17-20. See excellent discussion of this very phenomenon in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith: 2nd Edition - Revised and Updated* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 174-175. In this analysis, he cites Robert Dabney, then concludes: “I concur with Dabney’s [non-atemporal] analysis. Not to [agree] . . . and to insist that God is timeless, that is to say, that the distinctions of time and hence existence with succession have no reference to him, lies behind much theological mischief.” A few paragraphs later after discussing several key passages (Ps 90:2; Jer 1:5; Josh 24:5; Jer 12:15; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4; John 17:24) that discuss “before” and “after” with respect to God, time, and creation, he writes: “It would certainly seem that the past is past for God, the present is present for God, and the future is future for God as surely as they are for us! And while he certainly and infallibly knows the future because he ordained it, it is still as the future that he knows it.”

past is gone and the future is not yet.<sup>65</sup> He is not up in heaven in a totally-other, transcendent realm looking down upon past-present-future all-happening-at-once as atemporalists postulate. Such an a se-simple-atemporal-immutable Being cannot *by definition* have any relationship with diversity of any kind because such a changeless One can have no interaction (and hence no point of contact to make an analogy) with a universe possessing true diversity, interactive personality, change, and time as many ancient pagan philosophers stressed.<sup>66</sup>

However, our God according to Scripture is both interactively transcendent above and interactively immanent with people (Acts 17:24-28). Hence Scripture divides time and speaks directly about Father-God (Rev 1:4, 8, 4:8) and Christ (Heb 13:8) in terms of sequence: Before, now, afterwards. Is not the Spirit is revealing himself through the NT something univocal concerning his ontological Being, which cannot, of course, ever be understood comprehensively.<sup>67</sup>

I suggest, therefore, that God possesses a time-strand-in-himself, that is he is sempiternal, or better, omnitemporal. He possesses time-in-himself because he is suffi-

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<sup>65</sup>The answer to Augustine's classic query: Why did God wait so long to create? – can be answered by Deut 29:29. No one knows but God (Feinberg, *NOLH*).

<sup>66</sup>The gnostic and docetic controversies were about this very issue. Instead of using terms common to the cultural milieu and so modifying them that they no longer denote the original meaning, would it not have been better to merely state that God is a complex-simplicity of three perichoretic-interpenetrating Persons within a single Being and whose qualities include the ability to interact, to know, and to plan sequentially as Scripture teaches? God's character would then also be fully just, fully love, fully knowing, and fully powerful as each quality interpenetrates the others without being parts of God? I would suggest, though it is beyond the scope of this paper, that this kind of divinity unless modified beyond recognition cannot really think, interact, and be personal with humanity in any truly analogical manner; hence the constant retreat into mysticism in Western tradition.

Note, therefore, I don't see Scripture denying aseity (e.g., John 5:26; Exod 3:14-15), but only aseity based on non-diverse simplicity.

<sup>67</sup>Even W. L. Craig denies this: "The passage contemplates an everlasting future duration but affirms a beginning to past time's existence. . . 'before' time began." William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in *God and Time: Four Views* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 129-160, see 131.

cient in himself as Triune. Furthermore, the Godhead is not-impersonal but interpersonal – all three are aspects of a biblical view of the aseity of God. In other words, a time-strand within the Being of God is ordered-sequentiality. He possesses a time-strand in himself – similar but different from the time-strand belonging to the creation-order. Order and sequence do thus occur within God’s thoughts.<sup>68</sup> Otherwise he cannot be interactive, personal, and having a genuine knowledge of what is happening in human-experienced time. As docetic Gnosticism rightly taught, perfect, simple Oneness with no true diversity cannot by definition experience or enter the world of flux and diversity.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Scripture speaks of God’s thoughts (plural) “toward us” (Ps 40:5 NAU, ESV, AV; Isa 55:9; and probably Ps 139: 17). The divine time-strand is an aspect of these diverse-yet-unified thoughts. They are not a single, comprehensive thought as mandated by the classic simplicity doctrine, but thoughts. God thinks and acts both analytically-and-synthetically as well as synthetically-and-analytically in time and his tri-personal space within the Godhead. His thoughts are multiple-and-unified. This is because of who he is in himself as tri-une. In other words, he thinks through section-by-section, yet with the totality-in-mind by means of his being able to understand real-diversity-and-true-unity. He is able to understand both because he understands himself (Matt 11:27; 1 Cor 2:11).

Furthermore, God is able to understand unity-and-diversity and diversity-and-unity at the same time with his comprehensive multi-tasking knowledge and time-strand within himself. God is both able to analyze by particularizing, and he is able to synthesize by comprehending every aspect of meaning. God is able to do so because within himself is true perichoretic personal diversity-and-real-unity. He is a plural-unity or complex-unity. Hence, God did not and could not create an antithetical dialectic between unity and diversity (as in dualist thought). The two are not opposites but harmonies in the Godhead – and in fact in the original creation design – because he can only do that which reflects his glory. In other words, God is indeed bounded: Bounded by his Glory-Name and glorious nature.

In other words, divine analytical-synthesis is the diversifying of a whole (i.e., the many-one) while never losing total comprehension. His synthetic-analysis is unitizing and connecting into wholes-of-diversity, while never missing any aspect of the understanding of real diversity. God thinks both analytically and synthetically at the same time just as do human in an analogical, contingent, and creational manner because we are the *imago Dei*.

<sup>69</sup>Both John 1:1-8 and 1 John 1:1-4 make this as the defining point in the Apostle’s battle against proto-Gnosticism of his era. See Cripps, *ibid.*, 14-15; Thomas Senor, “Incarnation and Timelessness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 7, No. 2 (April 1990): 149-164.

The doctrine of absolute atemporality and the Incarnation are incompatible. The realm of absolute Oneness is a realm of absolute otherness, which has no interface with the realm of flux, time, multiplicity, and ability to suffer (impassibility). Christ could temporarily veil his omnipresence and omnipotence (Php 2:5-8). However, he could not go from a realm of absolute unchangeableness to one of mutability as the Gnostic Docetics correctly discerned. Therefore, his absolute presentness (Jn 8:58) is a presentness of omnitemporality

Consequently, the biblical God brings forth his pre-conceived plan out of his mind in sequence, step by step, sending his Word in the fullness of time (Jn 1:1, 14; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10 NIV). He plans the end from the beginning and every sequential step in between because he has pre-planned everything from before the beginning of CPT.<sup>70</sup> Therefore God calls himself “I AM the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” – the All-Powerful (Rev 1:4, 8, 21:6, 22:13).

In contrast, Aquinas, “defined an eternal being as one that is without beginning and without end, and that has no succession among its aspects.”<sup>71</sup> W. L. Craig correctly points out the pitfalls of this: If God “exists timelessly, He does not exist at any moment of time. He transcends time. . . . He has no past, present, and future. . . . We may try assert that ‘God exists’ in the timeless sense of existence, but not that ‘God exists now.’”<sup>72</sup>

## **Biblical Information on God’s Relation to Time**

### ***Deconstructing an Agnostic Perspective***

Job writes: “How great is God—beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out” (36:26 NIV). Even some such as sempiternist, John Feinberg,

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<sup>70</sup>See Robert Reymond’s excellent treatment of this as the teleological principle (Reymond, *New Systematic*, 488-502). Again contra Stump and Kretzmann, *REP*, 424: “Of course, there are things an atemporal God could not do – such as remembering, or planning ahead. . . . Furthermore, an atemporal God could not change the past or foreknow the future. Such actions, if possible at all, would require a temporal location, without which there can be neither past nor future. ”

<sup>71</sup>Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 149

<sup>72</sup>Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 15. This is not just a verbal contradiction as Craig points out: If God transcends time then he does not exist now. Therefore, he does not exist. It is thus contradictory to state “God exists but does not exist now.” Language cannot express timeless existence, hence monist-dualist philosophers believe we must experience but cannot communicate this “truth.” This experience is “gnosis” – a non-analytical, non-discursive, non-verbal “experiential knowledge.” Furthermore, no point of contact exists between time bound universe and a timeless divinity. Hence any analogy between the two is excluded. Again contra Stump and Kretzmann, *REP*.

believes this is unclear: “My contention is that the biblical writers make no comments explicitly or implicitly that help us decide whether God’s eternity is temporal or atemporal.”<sup>73</sup> W. L. Craig, also a modified temporalist, claims: “Does the biblical teaching on divine eternity favor either one of these two views? The question turns out to be surprisingly difficult to answer.”<sup>74</sup> Is this accurate?

Oscar Cullmann’s classic study *Christ and Time*, summarizes the discussion accurately – though as James Barr<sup>75</sup> has shown, his method for reaching the conclusion was deeply flawed: “[The New Testament] does not make a philosophical, qualitative distinction between time and eternity. It knows linear time only.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, he believes time applies to God. In his classic article “God everlasting,” N. Wolterstorff agrees with Cullmann though not his process of arriving at the conclusion: “The biblical presentation of God presupposes that God is everlasting rather than eternal. . . . Thus God, too, has a time-strand. God’s life and existence is itself . . . in accord with that to be found in Oscar Cullmann’s *Christ and Time*.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, according to Cullmann and Wolterstorff as

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<sup>73</sup>Feinberg, *NOLH*, 258.

<sup>74</sup>Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 15, 20, 27.

<sup>75</sup>James Barr, in *Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961) and then more in depth in *Biblical Words for Time* (1969, 2nd ed.), strongly criticized Cullmann for two reasons. First, Cullmann uses a diachronic (etymological) method instead of a synchronic method. Second, Barr believes that answering the question of whether the Bible speaks to the issue of the nature of God and time, “affords so little material that [Cullmann’s] appeal to the lexical stock of the Bible rather than to its actual statements” is a desperate attempt to support his view. Barr, however, seems to refuse accepting legitimate deduction from the normal narrative, descriptive and poetic data of Scripture but seems to be looking for reflective contexts that speak about time with respect to God. In other words, he seems to be looking for a formal, discursive philosophical discussion on the subject in Scripture (ibid., 99; see 117, 132). Hence he bemoans “the very serious shortage within the Bible of the kind of actual statement about ‘time’ and ‘eternity’ which could form a sufficient basis for a Christian philosophical-theological view of time” (James Barr, *Biblical Words*, 131-132)

<sup>76</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (trans. Floyd V. Filson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), xxvi.

<sup>77</sup>Wolterstorff, “God everlasting,” 155.



two representatives<sup>78</sup> of this perspective, Scripture teaches that the Creator lives throughout an everlasting duration of time.

### *Semantics and Exegesis*

I presuppose that the biblical writers were not dualists holding to form-content, or a one-many, or any other similar dialectic. Using standard hermeneutical principles, they understood the OT history, chronologies, and worldview in a straightforward linear sense moving from creation to consummation. I suggest we apply these standard exegetical principles to the concepts concerning time revealed in the contexts of the OT and NT.

First, the clearest passages of Scripture must serve as the hermeneutical key by which less clear passage should be understood. Second, therefore, contemporary biblical theology agrees that word meanings come from clear contextual clues and certainly not from an externally imposed meaning set into the individual morphemes or from etymological considerations.<sup>79</sup> For example, the total meaning of the phrases “break a leg” or the LXX phrase “εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος” (see Heb 1:8), which could be translated “unto the ages of the ages,” cannot be discovered by mechanically adding up lexical meanings of the morphemes and words nor by doing etymological research. Certainly, “break a leg” means “good luck” and possesses meaning apart from each morpheme yet

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<sup>78</sup>Alan Padgett attempts to build a via media but really supports a temporalist position: The temporal view – the “everlasting viewpoint” . . . is the view clearly consistent with a straightforward reading of the Bible” but then he backpedals immediately, “although the Scriptures do not clearly favor any one developed philosophical model.” The reason, he claims, is supposed “theological inadequacy” because we “would expect God to transcend time in some way” like he transcends gender and space (Alan G. Padgett, “Eternity as Relative Timelessness,” in *God and Time: Four Views* (ed. Gregory E. Ganssle; Downers Grove, IL: IVP), 92-110, see 93.

However, these feelings of inadequacy seem more informed by our culture’s dualistic *Zeitgeist* than by the sola Scriptura principle. All we do know is that God uniformly reveals himself in gendered language, and we also know that within the Godhead is real personal spatiality as Karl Barth has reminded us.

<sup>79</sup>Barr did an excellent service here.

each byte of information, on the other hand, is necessary for the meaning of the whole phrase. Hence I agree with James Barr's conclusion that "a valid biblical theology [of God and time] can be built only upon the statements of the Bible, and not on the words of the Bible."<sup>80</sup>

### *Hebrew and Greek Words and Phrases Denoting Duration*

Next, we will explore the various key words meaning "duration" of time.

#### **עולם [ʾōlām] in Various Contexts**

In most contexts, this term means duration in past time or, as Philosopher Alan Padgett writes, "perpetuity [in time]."<sup>81</sup> For example, the OT mentions "ancient hills" (Gen 49:10; Deut 33:15), and describes personified Wisdom as existing "from ancient duration of time, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (Prov 8:23; cf. Gen 1:1, my translation). Wisdom existed "before" CPT began. Again,<sup>82</sup> this implies DMT before cosmic time (CPT).

Second, the word in other contexts implies an everlasting duration in future time: An "everlasting covenant" or "everlasting possession" (see Gen 9:16; 17:7-8, 13, 19; 48:4 NAU). This meaning is found in many poetic contexts. For example, note "everlasting reproach" (Ps 78:66; see Jer 23:40), "everlasting foundation" (Prov 10:25 NAU), "everlasting salvation" (Isa 45:17), and "everlasting joy" (Isa 51:11).<sup>83</sup> Garrett Dewese's ex-

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>81</sup>Barr, *Biblical Words*, 1962, 117.

<sup>82</sup>E.g., Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," 130, n. 5.

<sup>83</sup>See also Exodus 12:14 and similar passages: "Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance [עולם] (i.e., and ordinance enduring perpetually throughout all future generations of time; see also עולם combined with "generations," "sons," "house-dynasty," etc.: e.g., 12:17,24, 30:21, 31:16; Lev 3:17,

cellent study concurs: “The basic meaning of the word, then, would be somewhere in the range between ‘perpetuity, indefinite duration,’ and ‘remote, distant times.’”<sup>84</sup>

Third, in contexts dealing with God’s interactions with humanity, Hebrew poetry often parallels עולם with the clearly time oriented phrase “from generation to generation.” For example, “You, O LORD, rule forever; Your throne is from generation to generation” (Lam 5:19). This is making a reflective wisdom statement about the person of YHWH and his dominion. The LXX renders this fairly literally, which is echoed in the NT. Notice also the similar parallelism, “But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.” (Ps 33:11). Certainly the second phrase is time oriented (“through all generations [of time]” so the first term [עולם] ought also to be so because of the parallelism. If we correctly read this (and similar) phrases as applying to CPT, there is no reason not to apply the exact same terms to God with respect to intra-divine time (DMT) in contexts dealing with his everlasting character. Otherwise such language is without any meaning. Based on this meaning parallelism and on other cross references (e.g., Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4, 9-11, 10; etc.), I deduce that God made his plans in DMT before CPT and that he now is actually interacting with all ever-enduring [עולם] generations into future time.<sup>85</sup> Again *by definition*, an a se-simple-atemporal Be-

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6:15, 23:31; Num 10:8; Deut 12:28, 29:28; Jas 14:9; 1 Sam 20:42; 2 Sam 7:16; Ps 18:52). With respect to humans, עולם deals with future duration of time. .

<sup>84</sup>DeWeese, *GNT*, 96.

<sup>85</sup>The same type of parallelism is used with respect to wicked man’s relationship to and existence in future time. “It shall not be quenched night or day; Its smoke shall go up forever; From generation to generation it shall be desolate; None shall pass through it forever and ever” (Isa 34:10). “Forever” [לעולם] is paralleled in meaning to “from generation to generation” [מְדוֹר לְדוֹר]. This is similar to: “They shall possess it forever; From generation to generation they shall dwell in it.” (Isa 34:17).

ing, which knows no real diversity, is not able to know or interact with the true diversity of CPT. Such simplicity and real diversity are antithetical opposites.

Second, those who relegate these types of phrases paralleling עולם with “from generation to generation” to a mere anthropomorphic figure of speech when used with respect to God must logically presuppose an unchanging-atemporal-and-simple-divinity otherwise they would have no reason to adjust the straightforward historical-grammatical meaning.<sup>86</sup> It seems, then, an extra-biblical a priori is the lens through which the passages are read instead of biblical-Trinitarian<sup>87</sup> lenses, an a priori that relegates these statements to a mere human perspective that possesses no information about the Godhead.<sup>88</sup>

Third, as mentioned, biblical analogies referring to God univocally compare something in the creation-revelation to something in God needing to be elucidated. If God were actually an unchanging-atemporal-and-simple-divinity, statements concerning the everlasting duration of time throughout all generations would be incoherent because they would have no actual reference to anything about the ultimate reality which is God.<sup>89</sup> According to the descriptions in Scripture, God is not simple in such a manner – a fact easily comprehended once one correctly understands the definition of a simple, undi-

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<sup>86</sup>Again, I presuppose that the sola Scriptura principle holds as axiomatic what Scripture perspicuously teaches: Divine wisdom is above all human tradition, whether that traditional teaching is what modernity divides into religious, philosophical, or scientific teaching (Matt 15:1-9; Col 2:8, 22, etc.) (WCF 1:6; BC, Art. 6, 7).

<sup>87</sup>That is, Scripture provides a lens presupposing that true-unity-and-real-diversity exist always within the Godhead and his created universe. This axiom is both inescapable and irresistible.

<sup>88</sup>The cultural milieu of the ancient Greco-Roman world was dualistic as H. Dooyeweerd, K. S. Latourette, and G.E. Ladd, as examples of many others, have pointed out. The early fathers were certainly not Hellenists as von Harnack claimed but, I would suggest, syncretists in this specific matter. But again this is not a paper in historical theology.

<sup>89</sup>Again, undivided, non-sequential, and unchanging simplicity cannot enter the realm of successive diversity, let alone relate to it.

vided Oneness. Note the following: “The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting [עולם] arms” (Deut 33:27). Are not then God’s “everlasting arms” – clearly a metaphor of God’s immanent power in CPT since God is spirit – perpetually enduring throughout all DMT and CPT because he does not change in character?<sup>90</sup> Psalm 10:16 is also a reflective context that means something similar: “The LORD is king forever and ever.” There are many such phrases in the Hebrew OT.<sup>91</sup>

Fourth, in contexts concerning the character of God, phrases using עולם often imply “duration throughout all time” – both enduring past and future time. For example, the Chronicler writes: “His lovingkindness is enduring-everlasting [עולם]” (1Chr 16:34; see Ps 118:1, 2, 3, 4; et al). In other words, God’s loyal-love never changes in any era of DMT or CPT.<sup>92</sup> The only way around this is to claim that God becomes temporal only when he creates. Clearly the logical deduction can be made from this and similar passages that God is everlasting – not atemporally eternal – before he created the physical metric of the universe. In this sense, Abraham named YHWH, God עולם: “he called upon the name of the LORD, the everlasting God” in honor of the God who was “with him” in real-time interaction in whatever he did (Gen 21:22, 33 ESV).

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<sup>90</sup>The metaphor is not teaching that God has “arms,” but that God’s power helps humanity, which, since it is everlastingly enduring, is never changing – an awesome comfort for believers.

<sup>91</sup>For example, the following reflective context: “But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation” (Dan 4:34). Only a Monarch with a prior time-strand (DMT) can interact with humans in everlasting future time.

<sup>92</sup>Because there is no point of contact between time and timeless eternity, the analogy-as-equivocation perspective does not help.

Notice also the context of the temporal phrase often used concerning the LORD's immanent Being: "From everlasting to everlasting." Here "from" implies past time, which is ever-enduring (עולם) and "to" implies an ever-enduring (עולם) future (see also 1 Chr 16:36, 29:10; Ps 41:13, 90:2, 103:17, 106:48).<sup>93</sup> Consequently, Scripture speaks of YHWH's faithfulness as being עולם (ever-enduring and never changing) (Ps 117:2) and his essential righteousness as עולם. Hence every one of his righteous ordinances revealed in time has an essential everlasting [עולם] core meaning (Ps 119:142). The reason is that his character-name (YHWH) is עולם and is unchangingly עולם (Ps 135:13). Consequently, his revealed way is עולם (Ps 139:24; Hab 3:6) and hence his kingdom-reign is – indeed must also be – עולם (Ps 145:13). Furthermore, believers are called upon to "trust in YHWH into the far duration of future time," – using synonyms of עולם – because in YHWH we have "an ever-enduring [עולם] Rock" (Isa 26:4, my translation).

This implies that YHWH, the "ancient of days" (Dan 7:9, 13, 22),<sup>94</sup> and his "salvation shall be עולם." Therefore "[His] . . . righteousness shall not be broken" from the present on into the future, as the Hebrew grammar implies. The context reminds us that

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<sup>93</sup>Note also "Praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting" (Neh 9:5). See again Craig's contrary discussion (Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 15; "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," 131): "Does the biblical teaching on divine eternity favor either one of these views? The question turns out to be surprisingly difficult to answer. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the biblical writers typically portray God as engaged in temporal activities, including foreknowing the future and remembering the past; and when they speak directly of God's eternal existence they do so in terms of beginninglessness and endless temporal duration" (Craig *Time and Eternity*, 15).

<sup>94</sup>Again a time oriented word. Certainly an omnitemporal God can have a time-strand (DMT) that can be analogously compared to CPT but an atemporal Divinity cannot have any analogy to the time-strand of the cosmos.

the heaven, earth, and all its inhabitants will wear out and pass away (vs. 6) but the LORD ever-remains. So therefore, the LORD states, do not be afraid of men who are short-lived in years, being eaten by “moth” and “grubs” because “My righteousness is עולם and My salvation exists unto all [future] generations” (Isa 51:6, 8, my translation).

This last passage again parallels God’s quality of עולם with the time oriented phrase “unto [future] generations.” Here the parallel phrase stresses God’s ever-perpetual years in contrast to the short time-existence of the earth and its inhabitants, giving us comfort and strength. Yahweh is thus also his people’s everlasting [עולם] light shining into the ever-enduring future in the new heavens and earth (Isa 60:19-20): “I will make you [Zion] an everlasting [עולם] pride, A joy from generation to generation” because it shines out the Lord’s glory (Isa 60:15; see also Dan 4:3).<sup>95</sup>

In summary, these contexts all deal with the ever-enduring nature of the LORD. They use language that when read without extra-biblical presuppositions state that God is enduring throughout both CPT, and by direct implication, also throughout intra-Trinitarian DMT (see also Isa 57:15). Philosopher G. DeWeese agrees: “Given the semantics of *ʿōlām* as seen in non-theological uses, when *ʿōlām* is used attributively of God it would seem that a notion of everlastingness or perpetuity (sempiternity—everlasting duration in time—rather than atemporality) is intended.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Daniel 4:3: “How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation.”

<sup>96</sup>DeWeese, *GNT*, 96 (italics in original).

The contrast in Psalm 139:24 and Habakkuk 3:6 is between the perpetually enduring hills, the ancient [עולם] mountains, with the God whose ways are ever-enduring [עולם]. The first two are obviously time oriented so by analogy, the second must be as well unless one first presupposes the simplicity-atemporalist

### *Meaning of Key Greek Terms in LXX and Koinē Contexts*

Next, it is helpful to look at the influential *Lexicon* by Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida. Both wrote after the paradigm shift expressed in James Barr's classic volumes and surely were cognizant of it. They write that both the synonyms "ἄϊδιος, ον and αἰώνιος, ον" mean "eternal" in the sense of "pertaining to an unlimited duration of time." Interestingly enough, Barr himself agrees: "No case of a free context meaning 'eternity' [i.e., outside of time] could be found." The terms καιρὸς, ὥρα, χρόνος normally mean "points of time" that consist of "occasions for particular events" along a temporal continuum. Hence, these scholars agree with Cullmann that the foundational meaning" in various koinē contexts of αἰών-group and other synonymous words in the semantic domain "time" is indeed related to the passing and duration of time.<sup>97</sup> They substantiate Cullmann's intuition about the NT's teaching on time (though not his methodology).

Furthermore, note the following phrases with derivatives of the word αἰών, each of which has a time orientation in reflective contexts dealing with the nature of the Christ and the Father. Certainly they are not reflective in the sense of a didactic philosophical

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doctrine. On Ps 145:13 and citing Gesenius and Kautzsch's *Hebrew Grammar*, DeWeese comments that the use of the plural of extension is probably indicative of a "lengthened period of time" (DeWeese, *GNT*, 96). Later he adds the following concerning the "parallel expression 'all generations.'" "Clearly generations are successive, and while placing a concept of succession in parallel with the common word for eternity does not prove that the Hebrew concept of eternity was of succession, it at makes that interpretation possible" (DeWeese, *GNT*, 105). I believe his conclusion is much too timid otherwise the parallelism is not comprehensible. On Isa 26:4, note the double mention of the LORD's name. The "All Sufficient, Ever-living One" is a possible paraphrase.

<sup>97</sup>See first, James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) and James Barr, *Biblical Words*, 121. Then note Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, eds., "67.96 ἄϊδιος, ον; αἰώνιος, ον," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 Volume Set) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), and *Ibid.*, "7.1 καιρὸς, ὥρα, χρόνος."

Compare also the latest BGAD. Certainly F.W. Danker, the latest editor, is cognizant of Barr's critique: "1. A long period of time, without reference to beginning and end. . . . 2. Of time to come, which, if it has no end, is also known as eternity. Frederick W. Danker, ed., "αἰών, ὄνος," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).



discourse, but they are nonetheless a meditation upon the nature of God, time, and the ever-enduring future interaction with God.

Listen to these two doxologies of Peter and Paul, which I have translated rather literalistically: “Αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος” [“unto him (belongs) the glory both now (present day) and the (future) day of the age”] (2 Pet 3:18) and “αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα . . . εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων” [“to him (belongs) the glory . . . unto all the generations of the age of the ages”] (Eph 3:21). Both clearly echo OT usage via the Septuagint, and normally would impute everlasting time to the nature of God and his Son when read in a straightforward manner.<sup>98</sup> At the very minimum, these passages state that humans will have everlasting life interacting with God and praising him and his Messiah throughout an unending duration of time.

Now how will that time be measured in the absence of the sun or moon shining (Rev 21:23)? The logical conclusion seems to be that humans will experience an everlasting life of successive moments like their Creator and Redeemer in true analogical imitation of the divine, internal time-strand. The creation reflects who God is. It is thus proper that creational time reflects God and his internal, sequential time-strand.

### ***Building Further Using Other Key Contexts***

Building upon the discussion of biblical terms in context, I turn next to other key texts that give information concerning God and time. This information depends upon po-

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<sup>98</sup>The analogical-equivocation view could be used to explain these as anthropomorphic metaphors. However, in the light of the clear passages discussed, I suggest that this concept would possibly not be normally considered except in the light of a prior commitment to the ideal of a perfect, a se divinity, who must also be simple and atemporal. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss how the church fathers tried to find this divinity in Scripture and even whether they would have even considered such a search if the cultural context had not been asking these questions in the first place.

etic parallelisms in passages that exemplify typical Hebrew usage from all periods in which the Hebrew Bible was written (e.g., Gen 17:7; Pss 12:7, 33:11, 135:13, 145:13; Isa 34:17, 60:15; Lam 5:19; Dan 4:3, 34).<sup>99</sup>

First, in all these passages, “forever” or “everlasting” [עולם] is in synonymous parallelism with “to all generations”<sup>100</sup> showing that both phrases are time oriented. Psalms 100:5 and 119:89-90 are noteworthy examples of this parallelism: “For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting [עולם], And His faithfulness to all generations;” and “Forever [עולם], O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness *continues* throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands [throughout time—by implication].” Similar phrases deal with perpetually enduring, human covenants (e.g., Abrahamic), dynasties (Davidic), and so forth that exist throughout all future time. Logically, the same terms and poetic parallelisms concerning ever-enduring time when speaking about humanity must be analogous in meaning when dealing with divine ever-enduring omnitemporality. In the context of both these Psalms, “דור” means a “period,” “generation,” or an age and is clearly a time indicator.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, in context and by poetic parallelism “forever, לעולם”<sup>102</sup> is *also* most often a time indicator meaning “enduring through the years” or “into everlasting time.”

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<sup>99</sup>Various versions translate “עולם” “forever,” sometimes “everlasting.”

<sup>100</sup>לדר ודר = εις γενεαν και γενεαν, (LXX, see also Joel 4:20) and similar phrases.

<sup>101</sup>See also Ps 72:5 concerning the sun and moon’s endurance throughout all “generations of time [דור דורות].”

<sup>102</sup>Gen 3:22, 6:3; Exod 3:15, 15:18, 21:6, 31:17, 32:13; Lev 25:46; Deut 5:29, 32:40; 1 Kgs 1:31, 2:33, 9:5, 10:9; Job 7:16; Pss 45:18, 75:10, 92:9, 136:3.

Second, similar to these is YHWH's statement in a unique, self-reflective context: "Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever [לְעוֹלָם]” (Deut 32:40; see also Ps 92:8, 136:3).<sup>103</sup> In the LXX the phrase is translated “unto the [future] ages” [εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα], thus most likely implying that in the minds of the translators αἰῶν is indeed a word meaning temporal duration similar to the Hebrew original, as O. Cullmann contended.<sup>104</sup> Thus the context of the sentence and not merely an abstract lexical meaning or an abstraction from the lexical stock determine the meaning. In summary, several of the passages cited above clearly state that God exists in an *everlasting* duration of – absent, of course, an extra-biblical preunderstanding.

This deduction is further substantiated by the synonymous, Hebrew parallelism of, for example, Psalm 103:17: “The loyal graciousness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting” – using עוֹלָם–based phrases – “upon those who respect Him, And His covenant faithfulness to children’s children” (my translation). Here “children’s children” is a stylistic replacement for the normal Hebrew phrase translated “unto generations and generations.” This same stylistic replacement is found in Ps 105:8-10: “He has remembered His covenant forever [לְעוֹלָם, αἰῶνα, LXX], The word which He commanded to a

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<sup>103</sup>Could the Lord be “lispering” to us in baby talk, as Calvin said, but not be revealing any real truth about his everlasting, internal time-strand. If so, then the inerrancy of the Scripture is at stake. Instead, God speaks truth to us in simpler terms. For example, in answer to a child’s question, “Where do babies come from,” two possible answers could be given. First, “storks carry babies to each home.” This is something a child could understand but is a manifest prevarication, something which God cannot do (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18). The other generic but truthful answer could be, “Our baby came from momma’s belly,” which for a child is understandable and truthful in a simplified form. The second is consistent with my thesis. We don’t know everything about an internal, divine time-strand, but we do know one point of contact: It is a sequential process.

<sup>104</sup>See following passages for similar parallels: Exod 3:15; Ps 49:11, 79:13, 85:5, 89:1, 4, 100:5, 102:12, 106:31, 146:10; Prov 27:24; Isa 51:8; Eph 3:21.

thousand generations . . . . Then He confirmed it . . . as an everlasting [עולם, αἰώνιον, LXX] covenant.” Both “generations” and “children’s children” are clearly time-oriented phrases, and are parallel with “everlasting/eternal” thus the “everlasting/eternal” and “everlasting to everlasting” phrases in both Hebrew and Greek seems also clearly to be time-oriented.

Garrett DeWeese’s very tempered conclusion is quite sustainable: “Careful contextual study of crucial texts relating to God’s eternity shows that timeless duration is not the required interpretation, and that some sort of temporal succession is either presumed or allowed for God’s temporal mode of being.”<sup>105</sup>

### *NT writers echo Septuagint translation*

I presuppose that when the New Testament writers use or echo the Septuagint’s translations of Hebrew time phrases, they reflect the same basic meaning as discovered above. This is logical in the light of the truthfulness and unity of God’s truth in Scripture. For example, first, note the following echoes of Septuagint usage:<sup>106</sup> “Now unto the King of the ages [everlasting King] . . . be honor and glory unto the ages of ages [unto future ages]” (1 Tim 1:1, my translation). It is comparable to other NT phrases in imputing sometimes ever-past but often also ever-future time-existence to God. The passage de-

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<sup>105</sup>DeWeese, *GNT*, 104. Alan Padgett (Padgett, *God, Eternity*, 35), who studied for a PhD under James Barr, is much stronger. Summarizing his biblical case and dismantling Brian Davies more recent attempt to establish a Scriptural case for divine atemporality, Padgett writes: “In each of his arguments, then, Davies has failed to demonstrate that a Biblical [*sic*] theology can affirm the absolute timelessness of God.” He then continues: “If the OT and NT nowhere teach nor imply an absolute timeless divine eternity, how did exegetes and theologians so deceive themselves. Cullmann is surely right to point to the influence of Platonism on the Christian tradition [in *Christ and Time*]. A classic article demonstrating this is William Kneale, “Time and Eternity in Theology,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960):87 – 108.

<sup>106</sup>For example, note Neh 9:5 “ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως τοῦ τοῦ αἰῶνος,” in which “αἰῶνος” is the LXX Greek of the Hebrew “עולם” See also e.g., Pss 45:6 (44:7 LXX), 45:17//44:18.

scribes ever-future human interactive worship as well (see e.g., Rom 11:36, 16:25-27; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:20-21; Phil 4:20; 2 Tim 4:18; Jude 24-25).<sup>107</sup> Certainly this could mean that God the Father is King over the ages – that is Sovereign over CPT – and hence ever-enduring praise as Creator belongs to him. However, again sovereignty and grateful response of praise are interactive terms that cannot be fulfilled with an absent,<sup>108</sup> a simple-atemporal divinity that cannot enter or let alone interact with diversity. Here, the New Testament usage of “αἰών”-based phrases cannot be divorced from the Hebrew usage via the LXX. The koinē NT via the LXX also uses Hebrew time-oriented concepts that are often paralleled with other time-oriented concepts such as “unto the future generations.”

Second, the key to understanding the NT words used for time within their scriptural contexts is the God-breathed worldview of the NT writers. All of them except possibly Luke were Jews and all were steeped in the language and worldview of the Hebrew prophets. They were deeply influenced by the concepts and contexts in which Hebrew terms and their LXX Greek translations were used. The key influence upon them, hence,

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<sup>107</sup>Notice especially the interactivity through time in and through God in Romans 11:36: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” and in Romans 16:26-27: “the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations [the Gospel], leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever [εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας most likely = Heb. עוֹלָם]. Amen.” (Not included in SBL text).

Galatians 1:4-5: “God and Father, to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen” is similar to Ephesians 3:21, which parallels “αἰών”-based phrases with similar LXX-based time phrases about future generations: “to [God] be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (NAU)

<sup>108</sup>Openness of God theologian, William Hasker, nevertheless speaks correctly on this issue in “The Absence of the Timeless God”: “A certain way of understanding divine timelessness is in the end incoherent. The incoherence arises, however, only if one holds also that the biblical God is also *present* in his creation in a unique and intimate fashion. In order to avoid the incoherence, one must acknowledge that God is *not* thus present but is rather absent from the world. It is controversial whether this consequence should be accepted. If one finds it unacceptable, one should conclude that the timeless God is “absent” in yet another sense—that there is no timeless God, that the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the universe is the God who is everlasting” (Hasker, “Absence,” 182; emphasis in the original).

is not philosophical dualism but prophetic-divine proto-Trinitarianism from the ever-truthful Spirit. It is, hence, not a matter of a Hebrew versus a Greek worldview but of God's prophetic perspective in Scripture versus the antithetical unbelieving worldview common throughout the ancient world that is at issue.

***Stand-alone time-oriented phrases and divine temporality***

Furthermore, it seems then quite probable that the stand alone phrases לעולם ועד and its LXX equivalent in such passages as Daniel 12:3; Ps 9:6; Mic 4:5; etc. are also authorially intended to be temporally oriented.<sup>109</sup> These phrases mean something like “unto everlasting ages of the ages” [in the future] as the Greek translators seemed to indicate. As mentioned previously, Paul echoes this same Hebrew usage in Ephesians 3:21 when he uses a similar type of OT blessing formula referring to the Father and his Son-Messiah: “to Him be the glory . . . to all generations forever and ever” (see e.g., Dan 7:18 LXX; Ps 44:18 LXX [45:17]; Ps 144:13 LXX [145:13]). These impute future everlasting time to human praise interaction with God, who it is clear, is presupposed to be everlasting.

A second similar expression also demonstrates the time orientation of לעולם and its parallel synonyms in the Hebrew and LXX: “From this time forth and forever” [מעתה ועד-עולם, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος (LXX)] (Ps 115:18). Based on what we

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<sup>109</sup>See also, Isa 9:6; 1 Chr 29:10; Pss 103:17 113:2, 115:18, 121:8, 125:2, 131:3, Isa 9:6, 59:21; Jer 7:7, 25:5; Mic 4:7); note also, Jer 7:7, 25:5. All of these synonymous phrases deal with the nature of God and are parallel to similar phrases dealing with humans. If the same kinds of passages teach human duration throughout time, would not the same and similar phrases have a parallel meaning when dealing with God throughout time? I think so.

have discovered, an awkward but still understandable meaning of *מעתה* could well be “from now-time” so the rest of the phrase could mean, “unto everlasting future duration of time,” which is how the Greek translators seem to render the phrase, “from now and even till the [future] ages.”<sup>110</sup>

Third, based upon what we have seen so far, Isaiah 57:15 also most likely indicates that God exists throughout all time, contrary to some who believe the passage teaches he lives in a timeless eternity: “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity” (ESV). The phrase, *שכן עד* (qal participle with masculine noun), which together most likely is a name meaning something like: “Ever-Living Everlasting One.” The terms together could be a paraphrase of the covenant name of God, “יהוה”<sup>111</sup> (see similar concept in Isa 43:13).

Fourth, let’s once more revisit Psalm 90:1-2: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” Moses is philosophically meditating upon YHWH’s nature and his relation to time. The first sentence is about the Israelites’ experience of God in CPT. However the second sentence definitely reflects upon God’s relation to time before the creation. This is, of course, poetry but that was the medium for Semitic discussions of philosophical issue’s not the discursive, didactic prose of Greek wisdom reflection. Now in this sentence, Moses writes that God “is [the living] God” “before” [*בטרם*; LXX *πρὸ.*, before] the creation-birth of the mountains,

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<sup>110</sup>The exact same Hebrew phrase is found in the following passages: Pss 113:2; 115:18; 121:8; 125:2; 131:3; Isa 9:6; 59:21; Mic 4:7.

<sup>111</sup>Or the Tetragrammaton: “YHWH.”

the earth, and the world. Hence, based on what we have seen, the LORD is God in his DMT “even from everlasting [past] to everlasting [future]” [ומעולם עד-עולם].

Similar to what I have mentioned previously, “before,” in the phrase translated “before the mountains” is an adverb of time that is actually coupled with the preposition “ב, in/at/by/with/among” (most likely it means something like “in before time” or “in previous time”). This use of language would be totally nonsensical with an atemporal view of God who has no “before,” “after,” or “now” in perception. God lives before-in-time the earth was created and existed from eternal ages [past] unto eternal ages [future], as the LXX translators seem to have rendered the phrase. Of course, if one has a prior gnosis that God is an a-se-simple-therefore-atemporal Oneness, one could reinterpret this phrase by using an equivocal form of the analogy doctrine so that it possesses nothing much to say about God’s immanent Being. Yet my contention is that doing so would be eisegesis. Here again historical grammatical exegesis does not support the atemporal-God thesis. It seems sure, then, that Cullmann’s gut intuition is again vindicated – though not his methodology.<sup>112</sup>

A key purpose of Psalm 90, it seems, is to contrast the brevity of human life time in the wilderness wandering (“seventy years, . . . eighty years,” Ps 90:10) with the im-

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<sup>112</sup>Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 39. DeWeese again is too timid in his conclusions against the preponderance of the evidence that he gathers of the normal contextual use of *αἰών*-group of words as enduring in time: “No conclusions can be reached regarding either the temporality or the timelessness of eternity on the basis of the use of *αἰών*” (DeWeese, *GNT*, 102). If the normal understood use of the term in contexts deal with enduring earthly time, only an a priori assumption can overturn that usage with respect to God in such passages as Eph 1:4, 3:11; 1 Pet 1:20, including Rom 16:26. Notice again that Eph 1:4 and 1 Pet 1:20 speak about “before” the creation of the earth. This presupposes that there was time “before” CPT as we have seen. Because God is a se, that time must be internal to the Godhead’s mental status, as we have seen. Thus we ought to translate the term τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ as “the everlasting God” rather than “the eternal [timeless] God” in Romans 16:26. Indeed the rather complicated sentence itself bears this out. This God has now interacted in CPT something an atemporal-simple Oneness cannot do by definition.



mensity of the ever-enduring time of God's existence. For God, even a "thousand years" are like "yesterday" or even a short "watch in the night" (Ps 90:4). An atemporal God cannot experience a millennium let alone a short time in the night of earth's solar time. To claim this is analogical language is to beg the question. Therefore, Moses concludes, since we humans are so short-lived in comparison with God and his wisdom, let us reckon with our brief years of time ("number our days") so that we can discover God's true and extremely ancient-in-time "wisdom" (Ps 90:12).

Fifth, another Psalmist also implies this in another context, though not as certain as those cited above. "Your [royal] throne has been established from that time . . . from everlasting You are" (Ps 93:2). The BDB indicates that "from that time" [מֵעַתָּה] is a "strictly temporal" term "of past time."<sup>113</sup> Thus in the immediate poetic parallelism and in the context, the Psalmist is stating that God and his throne are of ever-enduring past-time existence. Being "from" ancient times, his "testimonies/witnesses" concerning life and truth are "fully confirmed" (Ps 93:5). Hence his wonderful transcendent wisdom (translated "holiness") is filling his heavenly palace-house and is befitting this dwelling place "forevermore." This means, most likely, "from [previous] everlasting time, God is living." In addition, God also exists literally "for [everlasting] length of days" in future time. Hence, the passage seems likely to be stating that God's endurance in time is ever-ancient [everlasting] in the past and everlasting in the future.

Sixth, the teaching that God is everlastingly temporal in time is further indicated in Psalms 102:12, 24-27 and 106:31, 48. Here, the Psalmist is comparing both his "days"

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<sup>113</sup>F. Brown, "מֵעַתָּה," *BDB*.

to a “lengthened shadow” near the end of the day (102:11) and his “weakened strength” and “shortened . . . days” (v. 23) to the “years” of God, who “abides” or “sits enthroned forever” that is “to all generations” (102:12) (“throughout all generations”: 102:24b). Psalm 102 later also states that even the ancient universe that God created will wear out but “You [YHWH] *are* He and Your years will never come to an end” (Ps 102:6-27, my translation). This passage is likely another reference to the name of God as YHWH, the ever-living and always-existing Being.<sup>114</sup> He, as the I AM, has lived throughout everlasting time/years past and will be living so in future. His years have been never ending in the past-time and will never be ending in the future-time. This seems to be the clear implication of לֹא יִתְמוּ [“not finished, come to an end; qal imperfect plus “not”] and its Greek equivalent in this passage. Once more the poetically parallel expressions “years” and “generations” are time-words comparing human temporal existence to divine ever-temporal existence. Relegating this to anthropomorphic analogy is the fallacy of *petitio principii*. The burden of proof belongs to the atemporal position.

In addition, notice the construction of Psalm 106:31: Phinehas’ justification will last for the length of time “to all generations forever [לְדָר וּדָר עַד-עוֹלָם].” This is a shortened form of the expression found in 102:12 see above concerning the divine reign. Both expressions refer to a time-strand: human and divine. Psalm 106 then ends with a

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<sup>114</sup>See use of similar expression in the first person: “I am (he)” (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 48:12; 51:12; Jer 29:23; Mark 13:6; Lk 21:8; John 8:18, 24, 28; 13:19; 18:5f, 8; Rev 2:23). See especially Isaiah 48:12. “I AM he, I am in former time and am in latter time.” This is most likely a play on the divine name. Therefore, YHWH seems to mean something like “HE IS the everlasting and all-sufficient one” in that context and several of the others listed immediately above. When God speaks of himself in first person he uses “I AM” but when humans speak his name we use “YHWH” – possibly “HE IS” (see context of Exod 3:14).

declaration of the everlasting time of YHWH, the God of Israel: He is to be praised “from everlasting [ever-enduring past time] to everlasting [ever-enduring future] time [ועד לעולם]” (my translation).

Seventh, Psalm 119:44 uniquely couples תמיד with לעולם ועד [“continually, ever-enduring and in perpetuity of time,” my translation]. תמיד is a word meaning in its various sentence contexts “continually, regularly, and uninterrupted continuity” throughout time.<sup>115</sup> Thus joined with לעולם ועד the whole phrase seems evidently to imply that the Psalmist is promising to guard YHWH’s instruction continually throughout all future time – until the everlasting time of the future. This confirms yet again the usual time orientation of the two words לעולם ועד when coupled together. The Septuagint translates the phrase: “διὰ παντός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. τοῦ αἰῶνος” [continually, unto the [future] ages and unto the ages of the ages, my translation]. The meaning of “[long] duration of time” is substantiated later in the context in Psalm 119:89 with another poetic parallelism: “Ever-enduring, O LORD, Your word stands in heaven, Your truth-faithfulness stands unto all [future] generations” (my translation). God’s word, then, in an ontological sense in the Person of the Logos is indeed ever-enduring.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs. “dymīT’,” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* [BDB]. (Oxford, 1907; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), “Particle adverb **B5172 1.** earliest and oftenest as adv., *continually*: **a.** of going on without interruption = *continuously*. **b.** of regular repetition: meals; journeys; of ritual: sacrifice. **2.** as subst.: **a.** of uninterrupted continuity.”

<sup>116</sup>Notice the long duration of time also implied in vs. 112: “forever” [for a long duration], even to the end.”

## Conclusions

For the hearts and minds of many world Christians, the result of a view of God not derived from Scripture alone seems to be a distant divinity – if that is what it may be called, frozen in time, without any ability to personally interact with us. This One, in addition, is not capable of any temporal sequence, change of thought and/or emotion. Though this is perhaps a caricature of the carefully nuanced, classic doctrine of God as it was syncretized a dualist and biblical perspective. Yet many in various world Christian communities would often come to believe and feel that he is an abstract deity, certainly not the Father someone could personally interact with in real time. As a result, whole branches of our Father’s universal community pray, praise and sing worship songs to Jesus the man who entered time from above yet with little reference to the Father. Still others, craving for relationship with God over-emphasize the Spirit. The relational Father, who interacted with his Son before the foundations of the earth were laid, remains distant and forgotten in too many believers’ lives. After all, did not the Lord state unequivocally that the Father has hidden the truth about his relationship to the Son, and hence to humanity, from “wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” that is those who come with child-like faith in Scripture (Lk 10:21-22 NIV; see 1 Cor 1:19-21, 3:18-21a)?<sup>117</sup>

This distant God we have carried overseas in our mission to the peoples of the earth. The Father, Scripture says, desires that the whole earth be filled with his glory, the

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<sup>117</sup>Again, the minds of the man-in-the-pew must be captive to the perspicuous Word of God, which if followed will reject Barth’s syncretism with Heidegger and existential philosophy, Openness Theology’s syncretism with aspects of panentheism, David Yonggi Cho’s syncretism with shamanistic animism, and so forth. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend this. The litmus test of theology is personal transformation, and then as millions of cells of believers emerge, the complete transformation of culture. This is not happening any more. I suggest the Western churches’ captivity to dualism as it impacts the doctrine of the Father is one foundational symptom.

glory he as Monarch of the universe shares with the Son and the Spirit. However, we seem to be robbing him of his glory with an idea about his Being, which makes him less than the interactional and fully personal one as revealed in Scripture,<sup>118</sup> whom we are to worship in the Spirit and in the Truth that is in Jesus.

Some claim that biblical authors most likely do not make any reflective metaphysical statement about time. On the contrary, every statement concerning time and God is indeed by definition a metaphysical statement unless they have no meaning whatsoever.<sup>119</sup> Philosophy means “love of wisdom.” The Hebrew apostles and prophets did indeed reflect deeply on metaphysical issues even though they often used a poetic genre though which the divine philosophy, if you will, is expressed as God breathed it out.

Therefore, all of these phrases about God and time – and many more like them – clearly speak wisdom concerning the nature of God. They reveal that he is everlasting in duration – not eternal. He lives throughout all of his internally reckoned time (DMT). He states concerning himself: “As I live forever.”<sup>120</sup> Would the original believing Hebrew readers have understood the prophetic penned phrases (with עולם and synonyms) when speaking about God in terms of dualist speculative philosophy or in terms of what these kinds of phrases normally mean when used concerning men and angels (CPT)? Surely in those contexts they mean “long, ancient past or future duration of time” – especially

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<sup>118</sup>Our doctrine of the personhood of the Father, Word, and Spirit must be derived from how the Scripture describes their inter-Trinitarian interaction in various windows on their relationship (see e.g., Lk 3:21-22, 10:21-22; Jn 12:28, 17). I presuppose that divine personhood is the model for human personhood and not vice versa.

<sup>119</sup>After all, for example, God is not physical (unless we adopt some kind of panentheism).

<sup>120</sup>DeWeese again concurs: “Given the semantics of `ôläm as seen in non-theological uses, when `ôläm is used attributively of God it would seem that a notion of everlastingness or perpetuity (sempiternity—everlasting duration in time—rather than atemporality) is intended” (DeWeese, *GNT*, 96).

when paralleled with “unto future generation.” Therefore they ought to mean the same with respect to the immanent divine life though in an unbounded, everlasting sense (DMT).

DeWeese summarizes what Scripture states – most likely again too mildly, while basically agreeing with Cullmann’s conclusions:

I . . . argue that careful contextual study of crucial texts relating to God’s eternity shows that timeless duration is not the required interpretation, and that some sort of temporal succession is either presumed or allowed for God’s temporal mode of being. . . . The medievalists were more heavily influenced by Neoplatonism than by biblical exegesis.<sup>121</sup>

The classic Plotinian tradition followed by Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas removes the divinity from time-as-succession and reconstructed every contrary biblical passage to fit the theory and not the Scriptural data. “To pay the price charged by the Plotinian concept of God is to move away from Christianity toward some other form of religion,” Wolterstorff rightly concludes on a related topic.<sup>122</sup> Indeed Scripture warns us against the source and doctrine of that “other form of religion” (1 John 1:1-4, 2:22, 4:1-7; 2 John 7; Col 2:8-9, 1 Tim 4:1-3).

The temporalist alternative is based on sound exegesis. This is a matter of prophetic revelation versus extra-biblical philosophical speculation read into Scripture.

DeWeese is accurate again in his conclusion:

I shall demonstrate that an examination of significant Hebrew and Greek words used to speak of time and eternity shows that none of them must be taken as referring to time as static or substantial, or to eternity as timeless. To the contrary, the basic concepts in both languages seem to be that of duration or sequence (with eternity being endless, limitless time). Hence, the biblical data do not require an

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 215.

idea of an atemporal God or of timeless eternity, and in fact might seem to support a concept of eternity as everlasting, entailing duration and succession, rather than the more traditionally accepted notion of eternity as timelessness.<sup>123</sup>

Therefore, “let God be true and every man a liar,” is always a believer’s foundation. This is true whether God’s Word deals with philosophical, scientific, or religious tradition. True biblical wisdom speaks to all three areas of human tradition without any dualist philosophical dialectic between true unity and real diverse sequentiality. We are complete and sufficient in him and his necessary wisdom alone (Col 2:4-10) even in the understanding of the Triune Godhead’s relationship to time. We thus approach our God’s throne of grace as interactional dependent humans. He is our Father, the interactional “one true God” who shares the same single Being with the Son and the Spirit. We are like him and not vice versa, hence we can know him, love, and interact with him, and yes become more like him in real cosmic time. And he interacts with us in love and answers to prayer both CPT and DMT – our time and his time!

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<sup>123</sup>DeWeese, *GNT* 94.