Restoration of Sonship: Reflections on Time and Eternity

• **Antonio López** •

"Eternity is the superabundant
and groundless being that reveals itself
in Christ as the truth of love."

Contemporary man, still under Lessing's spell, continues to perceive time and eternity as contradictory terms.[1] The athematic but nonetheless pervasive atheism that holds sway over Western culture has left man prone to busy himself with the "things of this world" while living naively oblivious to the eternal.[2] This decision, however

[1]There is an unsurmountable, "ugly ditch" between eternity and history: "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason" (Gotthold E. Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. H. Chadwick [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997], 51). See also Gordon E. Michalson, "Faith and History: The Shape of the Problem," *Modern Theology* 1, no. 4 (1985): 277–290; Allan Arkush, "Theology and 'Theater Logic' in *Nathan the Wise*," in *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom*, ed. Michael Palmer and Thomas L. Pangle (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 189-201; Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Natural Religion, Morality and Lessing's Ditch," in *Religions and the Virtue of Religion*, edited by Thérèse-Ann Druart and Mark Rasevic (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 57–73.

[2]See Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley and Anne E. Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Cornelio Fabro, *Introduzione all'ateismo moderno* (Roma: Editrice Studium, 1964); Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); Michael

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much it was initially welcomed as a liberation, results ultimately in a conception of temporality that is dominated by monotony and meaninglessness. In order to perceive that eternity and time are not two refractory realities, and that their true relation is what gives newness to history, requires the rediscovery that time is patterned after eternity and directed towards it.[3] If this is the case, then, without historicizing eternity (Hegel) or eternalizing time (Nietzsche), it would be possible to see that eternity is not simply a-historical but rather the truth of time.

The following theological essay offers a justification of the contention that eternity is the fulfillment of time because it is time's origin, archetype, and final confirmation. To support this claim, I will give an account of time not so much in terms of the "measure of movement" or of a subjective category, but in terms of "life," perceived not biologically but in light of an "ontology of gift." It goes without saying that this sense of time in terms of "life" does not need to be seen in dialectical opposition to time as "measure"; rather, it includes it from within itself. The ensuing reflection is divided into three stages: the first elucidates Plotinus' treatise on time to illustrate in what sense both eternity and time can be perceived in terms of life.[4] The second part gives an account of this life in light of

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Buckley, *At the Origin of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); David L. Schindler, "Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Problem of Atheism," *Communio* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 563–579; id., "On Meaning and the Death of God in the Academy," *Communio* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 192–206.

[3]The fact that time and eternity are not two incompatible realities can already be seen in Plotinus' contention that although "we run into difficulties" when we try to give an account of time and eternity, "we have a clear and distinct experience of them in our souls" (*Ennead* III, 7, 5. Plotinus, *Ennead* III, trans. A. H. Armstrong [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993]). References to the *Enneads* will be taken from this translation.

[4]Plotinus, *Ennead* III, 7. See also Steven K. Strange, "Plotinus on the Nature of Eternity and Time," in *Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lawrence P. Schrenk, vol. 27 of *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 22–53; Louis Roy, O.P., "Neither Within Nor Outside Time: Plotinus' Approach to Eternity," *Science et Esprit* 53 (2001): 419–426; J. E. McGuire and Steven K. Strange, "An Annotated Translation of Plotinus *Ennead* III 7: On Eternity and Time," *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988): 251–271; Hans Jonas, "Plotin über Ewigkeit und Zeit: Interpretation von *Enn.* III. 7," in *Politische Ordnung und menschliche Existenz: Festgabe für E. Voeglin*, ed. A. Dempt et al. (Munich: Beck, 1962), 295–319.

a theology of gift. The paper concludes by showing that time's attainment of its own truth in eternity is an eschatological event whose nature can be analogically and proleptically perceived in the divine bestowal of mercy, which, as John Paul II illustrates, is the restoration of sonship.[5]

1. A life all-together and full

Although an approach to the concept of eternity could start out from finite time, Plotinus proposes instead to explore the nature of eternity first. Under the light of this archetype one can better elucidate the nature of its image, time. There are some philosophers who, in order to elucidate the meaning of eternity begin with time, consider time as having to do mainly with movement or becoming. Thus, for instance, if time is the measure of "after" and "before," then eternity could be thought as absolute rest or "changelessness."[6] The advantage of this approach is that it secures the truth that eternity ultimately resists any conceptualization. It risks, however, a reduction of eternity to timelessness and the depiction of eternity as some sort of infinite continuance.[7] Plotinus clarifies that if eternity is neither open to a "will be" nor comes from a "having been" it should be thought from itself. Thus it would be possible to see that eternity is better represented as a "unity" which alone "is" and remains void of any duration. This singular "unity," Plotinus tells us, should be conceived as absolute presence, that is to say, as abiding in

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[5]John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 5–7.

[6]For Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's concept of time, see *Ennead* III, 7, 8–10; Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), IV, 10–14, 217b29–224a15.

[7]Fr. Matthew L. Lamb insists on the need to clarify the methodology adopted in the reflection on time and eternity in order to avoid representational misconstructions. See his "Eternity and Time in St. Thomas Aquinas's Lectures on St. John's Gospel," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew W. Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 127–139; id., "Eternity and Time," in *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach*, ed. Michael Foley and David Kries (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002), 195–214; id., "Divine Transcendence and Eternity," in *Continuity and Plurality in Catholic Theology*, ed. Anthony J. Cernera (Fairfield, Conn.: Sacred Heart University Press, 1998), 77-106.

itself without protension or regression. Eternity admits neither past nor future (III, 7, 5); it is infinite, and thus it can only be characterized as a complete whole lacking nothing, which is so only inasmuch as it is present to itself.[8] Still, he continues, to be the whole unchangeably by having the all without any "extension or interval" requires acknowledging that eternity is "a *life* which belongs to that which exists and is in being, all together and full" (III, 7, 3).[9]

In order to elucidate the meaning of life, one might be tempted to ascribe "life" to the first Plotinian hypostasis, the One. Nevertheless, although eternity refers to the "most majestic" (III, 7, 2), the presence "to itself" that determines eternity as absolute presence of the whole prevents Plotinus from doing so. The One remains beyond everything (being, existence, time, eternity, truth, goodness, and selfhood) because it is the origin of everything else. The One is absolute singularity and nothing can be predicated of it, lest its ineffable oneness lose itself in multiplicity.[10] Eternity's life thus refers to the second Plotinian hypostasis, the Intellect (*nous*), which is an activity of the One itself, its self-contemplation. As the "self-knowledge" of the One, the Intellect is "other" and "less" than the One (V, 1, 6). Plotinus insists that eternity is not added to the Intellect from outside; nor is eternity that in which the Intellect comes into being. Rather, eternity is the proper *mode of being* of the Intellect, and may also be described as "a god proclaiming and manifesting himself as he is" (III, 7, 5).[11]

For Plotinus, eternity and "life" indicate the very same reality because eternity is the activity that is essential to the intelligible realm: "an abiding of itself directed to the One and in the One, with no falsehood in its being or in its life" (III, 7, 6).[12] The "being

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[8]Plotinus also offers this definition of eternity: "If someone were in this way to speak of eternity as a *life* which is here and now endless because it is total and expends nothing of itself, since it has no past or future—for if it had, it would not now be a total life—he would be near to defining it" (III, 7, 5). Emphasis added. In this sense Plotinus is rightly seen as the root of the conception of eternity as an "eternal now."

[9]Emphasis added.

[10]See Plotinus V, 1–4; VI, 7, 12.

[11]In this way, Plotinus brings together the twofold meaning of *nous* as Intellect and Spirit.

[12]Here we can see both the similarities and the differences between Plotinus and

present all together as a complete whole to itself" proper to eternity entails a twofold direction: towards the One, and towards itself. Thus, in itself, eternity's life is not a mere changeless *nunc stans* but a fullness present to itself. It is not some sort of "eternal becoming" because "it possesses the whole," all that "it ought to be"; it is "all and not deficient in its wholeness" (III, 7, 6). Eternity is the pure activity of Intellect, and is completely unextended, lacking parts, moments, or succession of any sort (III, 7, 3).[13] For Plotinus, then, eternal life is not the hypostatization of historical life but the Intellect's being-present to itself in an unwavering contemplation of the One, which is the intellectual activity par excellence.

Plotinus, in examining the mysterious nature of eternity, goes beyond his predecessors in that he not only examines how eternity and time can be defined; he also explores the genetic relation that ties time to eternity.[14] While, for Plotinus, the eternal "quiet life" existed in fullness altogether without extension, there was still in the eternal "a restlessly active nature which wanted to be on its own," and thus sought "for more than its present state" (III, 7, 11). Soul, the third Plotinian hypostasis, is an "unquiet power" that desires to leave the unity proper to the eternal intellect and to go forward to a weaker extension. Soul does not wish the whole to be present to itself all together. Plotinus' use of this mythological form to explain the origin of time, however, should not deceive us into thinking that this other "active nature" denotes a deficiency in the Intellect. The Soul is not a hypostasis which, at some point, could have not existed or could cease to exist (III, 7, 4). Although,

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Aristotle. Plotinus, like Aristotle, considers the activity of the *nous* a type of life. Unlike Aristotle, Plotinus thinks that Aristotle's "unmoved mover" is not the first hypostasis. The self-thinking thought is, for Plotinus, the second hypostasis because self-thought already entails a division between the one and itself. See VI, 7, 37–42, for Plotinus' critique of the unmoved mover presented in Aristotle's *Met*. 12, 7 1072b26–27.

[13]While acknowledging the differences, it is interesting to indicate the similarities between this and Aquinas' thought. See *ST* I, q. 10, a. 1, ad 6; *ST* I, q. 63, a. 2; *SCG* I, 15 and I, 13. See also Bonaventure, *I Sent*, d. 9, a. 1, q. 3.

[14]Plato's ascendancy in Plotinus' work cannot be overemphasized. See Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 37C5–E6, 38B6–C3, 39C5–D2 and D7–E2, 47A2–B4. For an interesting and new account of Plato's famous text see Rémi Brague, *Du temps chez Platon et Aristote. Quatre études* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2003).

for Plotinus, that which proceeds from the higher principle is always inferior to it, its very descent from the One is the necessary outcome of the excellence of the principle.[15] It is precisely because eternity is a life in which everything is present altogether as a whole and directed to the contemplation of the One that it generates what it is not, the Soul, the third hypostasis. Since everything is all contained in unity in the Intellect, Soul has to turn "outside" in order to extend itself. The generation of the sensible world takes place when Soul looks at the Intellect without abiding in it. Thus, Soul made the cosmos after its archetype, the Intellect, and it "constructed time as an image of eternity."[16] As eternity is not that in which Intellect exists, time does not pre-exist Soul. Soul posits time along with the cosmos.[17]

For Plotinus, the resemblance between the image and the archetype denotes both the procession of time from eternity and the former's final fulfillment in the latter. It also indicates the dynamic relation between time and eternity. The image is continuously and actively open to the archetype. Hence, if eternity is life at rest, then, time, an image of eternity, "is the *life* of the soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another" (III, 7, 11). The reflection on eternity, Plotinus tells us, yields "the cause of the movement of the universe": to hasten "to everlasting existence by means of what is going to be" (III, 7, 4). For Plotinus time is life and not movement because there are many different types of movement and all occur always in time (III, 7, 8). Time is neither the accompaniment of movement nor, as Aristotle would have it, the measure of movement because, first, one cannot assume that every movement is a uniform movement, and second, because the magnitude which measures time ends up being erroneously identified with time itself. Instead, "time is something different from the number that measures by 'before'

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[15]Plotinus, V, 1, 6; VI, 9, 1; VI, 9, 6; VI, 7, 41; V, 3, 11.

[16]Here Plotinus once again follows Plato's *Timaeus* 37C5–E6. The circular movement of the heavens (horizontal and cosmological) is for Plotinus a circular movement of the Soul, which is detached from the One and tends towards it. For Plotinus the ontological priority of Soul over time does not imply that there is a moment in which time did not exist.

[17]Steven K. Strange explains that for Plotinus, "the soul's activity measures itself by picking a simple unity of regularly repeated motion, e.g., the sweep of a watch's second hand or the movement of the stars, to use as a standard of comparison," in "Plotinus on the Nature of Eternity and Time," 51.

and 'after'"; time exists even "before the soul which measures it" (III, 7, 9). Plotinus believes that thinking of finite time from its relation with eternity and not as the form intrinsic to the processes of becoming, makes it possible to see that motion is that which helps the Soul to seek time more easily because motion reflects the life of the soul (III, 7, 13). Time, then, is Soul's way of being. Unlike eternity, time is characterized by past, present, and future, because Soul wished to express Intellect's unextended fullness through time's finitude. Consequently, temporal life is an activity which "does not abide in the same, but does one act after another" (III, 7, 11).[18] For Plotinus, then, time is unity "in continuity," an "unbounded succession"; it is the whole which has been, is, and will be. It is important to see that although Soul's temporal mode of being is that of being dispersed in multiplicity, it also seeks to return to its origin, unity. In fact, Plotinus tells us that if, hypothetically, Soul would stop this activity of extending itself always forward—a "life which it now has without stop and [which is] never-ending"—and would completely return to the unity it came from, Intellect, then there would no longer be time or Soul, only eternity (III, 7, 12).

Plotinus' explanation of time as life of the Soul follows, then, two intersecting coordinates. On the one hand, it is the "descent" from the One into the multiplicity of the Soul through the multiplicity-in-unity proper to Intellect. This vertical, descending movement posits a horizontal movement in which Soul disperses itself in the plurality of finite beings. Within this being scattered in the realm of finitude, one is continuously invited through the contemplation of the beautiful, even the beauty of man's fallen soul, to return to one's origin (V, 1, 1; I, 6). As eternal life consists in that intellectual activity of being all at once with itself and always oriented towards the One, the nature of the temporal life of Soul consists, for Plotinus, in the ascent towards the Intellect, and beyond it, towards the gratuitously given contemplation of the One.[19] Plotinus' enriching treatise allows us to see that time and eternity are not two juxtaposed, impermeable realities, but are both understood in terms of life; the latter perfect in itself, the former seeking its perfection by returning to eternity.

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[18]Augustine's perception of the relation between time and psychology finds one of its roots here.

[19]See VI, 9, 11; VI, 9, 7.

Plotinus' concept of life, though not univocal, still requires specifying more precisely the distinction and unity between the two types of life. St. Augustine's reflection on time and eternity in the *Confessions*, while taking advantage of Plotinus' treatise, also corrects it by incorporating three crucial insights from Christian revelation.[20] First, eternity is an attribute of the one God and it designates the absolute plenitude of his being. Second, although for Augustine time is also the existential distance from its origin in God to its return to him, its separation from the eternal is not the result of a fall but is the gratuitous positing of real otherness. Time, the world, and man do not emanate from the One (XI, 3, 5); they are created, and are thus ontologically good. This ontological difference between the absolute and the finite is ultimately justifiable only by means of a theological difference within the absolute. When God creates, he does not look "outside"; he turns inside himself, so to speak: the world is created in the Word (XI, 5, 7), and time is brought into existence in that same act (XI, 13, 15).[21] Contrary to Plotinus, the presence of the logos in the One does not shatter its primordial unity. God's positing of time includes his guiding it towards its ultimate fulfillment, whose form, although unknown, is nonetheless certain (IV, 12, 19). The fall is not, Augustine explains, a necessary event, but the free and prideful rejection of divine love (II, 6, 14). Like Plotinus, Augustine contends that, in his fallen condition, the human being does wander

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[20]As M. Lamb indicates, the meaning of eternity can be adequately clarified only within the context of revealed religion. See Matthew L. Lamb, "Eternity and Time," 200. For the English translation we follow Augustine *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series*, vol. 1: *The Confessions and Letters of Augustine, with a Sketch of his Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 27–207. For the study of Plotinus' ascendency in Augustine's understanding of time, see Jean Guitton, *Le temps et l'éternité chez Plotin et Saint Augustin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990).

[21]I would like to clarify that this is not to judge Plotinus' treatise inadequate on the basis of its inability to think of the fullness of the One as able to incorporate the other two hypostases. The trinitarian God, notwithstanding the distinct allure of Hegel's reflection, cannot be produced by the mere speculative force of the concept. The theological difference is accessible for reflection only by means of revelation. See Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2: *The Consummate Religion*, trans. R.F. Brown et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

distractedly through the cosmos, dispersed in time, seizing the signs of the infinite beauty while not allowing himself be drawn to it (IX). Yet—and this is the third insight—since the relation between the human person and the absolute is understood in terms of love, the return is not, as in Plotinus, a matter of remembering and of intellectual discoveries, but of grace. Man's long-awaited return to the homeland is a grace that has been seeking man's reception (XI, 29, 39). We will now see more deeply what this intimation from divine revelation could entail for a reflection on eternity and time.

2. Eternal donation

Our affirmation that Christian revelation clarifies Plotinus' insight—of eternity and time understood in terms of life and presence—should not mislead us into thinking that theology can offer a conceptually comprehensive account of the nature of eternity. Eternity is an attribute of the one God; it is and remains a mystery.[22] The contention that the eternal mystery is not at the disposal of finite reason, however, does not force us into a dialectical understanding that would depict eternity merely as that which time is not. God's present, his not-extended remaining, is not merely timelessness. It is indeed possible to uphold this statement only because Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man (1 Tm 2:5–6), grants access to the ever-greater mystery: that God's essence is an absolute love (1 Jn 4:16), which is both an eternal being (*esse*), and an eternal threefold gift of himself to himself (Jn 10:38; 17:24–26). Thus, when Jesus Christ repeats God's "I am" (Ex 3:14, Jn 8:58), he is not stating, as Augustine clarifies, that there are two or three different absolute beginnings. Rather, he discloses that eternity is the Triune God.[23] Therefore, in order to avoid the risk of seeming to offer a synthesis that is impossible for human thought, any reflection on eternity and the life proper to the way of being of the eternal must keep in mind these two aspects revealed in Christ: that is, self-

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[22]See Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, *I* (PG 45), 365B–368; Augustine, *Confessions,* XI, 31, 41 et passim; Adrienne von Speyr, *The Word Becomes Flesh. Meditations on John 1–5*, trans. Sr. Lucia Wiedenhöver, O.C.D., and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 38–44.

[23]Augustine, *In Ioh. Ev.*, XXXIX, 3.

identity (*esse*) and eternal donation (the relation between the divine hypostases).[24]

The eternity of the one God is characterized by an abiding that, unlike time, lacks movement or extension of any sort, as Aquinas says.[25] Hence, God's "I am" is not a historical present that simply lacks beginning and end. Eternity, instead, is the "whole [divine *esse*] being present";[26] more specifically, eternity is, as Boethius says, an "unending *life*, and perfect possession."[27] This

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[24]Jesus of Nazareth, the *concrete universal*, discloses without exhausting the mystery of God's being. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994); id., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983); Jean Mouroux, *Le Mystère du Temps. Approche théologique* (Paris: Aubier, 1962); Antonio López, "Eternal Happening: God as an Event of Love," *Communio* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 214–245.

[25]Aquinas' negative definition of eternity "*omnino extra motum*" (*ST* I, q. 10, a. 1) offered in his treatment of the one God, needs to be seen in unity with his understanding of God as Triune. See also *SCG* I, 15. For a correct understanding of the meaning of duration in Aquinas, see Brian J. Shanley, "Eternity and Duration in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 61, no. 4 (1997): 525–548. In this article Fr. Shanley criticizes the influential article by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–458. See also Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 5, 7.

[26]"Totum esse praesens" (Augustine, *Confessions* XI, 11, 13). "For the years of God, and God Himself, are not different: but the years of God are the eternity of God: eternity is the very substance of God, which hath nothing changeable; there nothing is past, as if it were no longer: nothing is future, as if it existed not as yet. There is nothing there but, Is: there is not there, Was, and Will be; because what was, is now no longer: and what will be, is not as yet: but whatever is there, simply Is. . . . Behold this great I Am!" (Augustine, *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series*, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 121, 6; 101, 11.

[27]"Interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio," emphasis added. "Eternity, then, is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life, which becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things" (Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* V, 6, 9–11, trans. S. J. Tester [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003]). As we indicated in the elucidation of Plotinus above, it is important to see that time-less eternity does not mean life-less eternity. Boethius' combination of eternity and life retrieves the intrinsic destiny of time in eternity, its origin. See Ambrose, *Tractatus de Misteriis*, 8–16, quoted in Lamb, "Eternity and Time," 205. The confusion of this reading of eternity with an absolute concept derives more from late medieval thought. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. F. Crowe and R. Doran (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997).

possession, however, is not of the parts by a whole. Since the one, absolutely simple God is tri-personal, and personhood can be understood as the self who has dominion over himself, eternity is the total simultaneous possession "of itself."[28] Unlike the human being who is unable to remain in his ontological unity, God's possession of himself is the simultaneous possession of himself in his entirety without either change or deficiency (*indeficientiam*).[29] The incapacity of eternity to become less (*de-ficere*), beyond referring to the impossibility of non-existing, indicates that the essential aspect of the eternal life is absolute perfection, immeasurable plenitude.[30]

While acknowledging that God's eternity, as an attribute of the one God, remains altogether other, it is important to see, through divine revelation in Jesus Christ, that this spiritual, unquantifiable fullness is an unfathomable positivity that generates another within itself. Each of the three divine persons possesses the one essence not as closed in itself, but in "an act of perfect communication," an absolute donation of itself to the others.[31] Following to a certain extent Claude Bruaire's ontology of gift, I would like now to advance a brief theological elucidation of the eternal life proper to the triune God by presenting the threefold gift that characterizes

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[28]Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1. See also SCG I, 15. Christian revelation purifies and corrects two extreme positions: on the one hand, Plotinus' ineffable One and, on the other, the unconvincing unilateral rejection of unity in favor of the primacy of diversity and difference proper to postmodernity. According to the former position, eternity must be ascribed to the Intellect because selfhood fractures unity; the latter envisions eternity as the rejection of a poorly understood permanence and proposes the restless search for novelty. The trinitarian God is the only one able to account for the unity and difference that undergirds the cosmos's very being. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967); Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Postmodern or Modern-Plus?" *Communio* 17 (Summer 1990): 152–166.

[29]*ST* I, q, 10, a. 1, ad 6. Obviously, this "himself," while echoing Plotinus' insight, goes beyond it in that here the "self" is a person, a concept which is lacking in Plotinus' system.

[30]Jean Mouroux clarifies that when Aquinas defines eternity as "the measure of a permanent being; while time is a measure of movement," one cannot forget that there is no possibility of numbering in God. Hence the "measure" of the eternal is an indivisible measure that refers to God's unique unity and it is not at all congruous with the measure of time. See *ST* I, q. 10, a. 4; I, q. 40, a. 3; *II Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 5; Mouroux, *Le mystère du temps*, 26.

[31]Mouroux, *Le mystère du temps*, 28; *ST* I, q. 29, a. 4.

the absolute love revealed in Jesus Christ with these three terms: donation, reddition, confirmation.[32]After this summary account, I will characterize what sort of conception of eternity this approach allows.

Donation refers to the Father's divinity inasmuch as it is possessed by him only as completely given away (DS 528). It is not that first he is and then he gives all of himself. His hypostasis is his giving. His divinity is seen precisely in the fact that, in the total gift of himself, he remains himself (DS 805). The Son's personhood, as revealed in Christ, is inasmuch as he receives all of himself from the Father (Jn 5:19–20) and reciprocates in gratitude (*reddere*) the gift of self that he is. This relation of donation, behind which thought is unable to go, is of such positivity that the relation between the donation of the Father and the reddition of the Son is not a simple "exchange" of gifts, but is yet another, the Holy Spirit.[33] Always present as a ruse of love of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who also proceeds from the Son, is the confirmation of the gift.[34] He is "the gift of the giver and the giver of gifts"[35]; the "person-Gift" through

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[32]Claude Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit* (Paris: PUF, 1983). For a more detailed presentation and critique see my *Spirit's Gift. The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006). For an ontology of gift see also Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1982); David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church. Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996).

[33]For an understanding of the logic of gift in terms of "exchange," see Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don." It originally appeared in *L'anné sociologique*, 1923–1924, and can now be found in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1999), 145–279; Jacques Derrida, *La fausse monnaie,* vol. 1 of *Donner le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); id., "Donner la mort," in *L'éthique du don. Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté and Michael Wetzel (Paris: Métailié-Transition, 1992), 11–108. For an interesting presentation and critique of Derrida's and Marion's understanding of gift, see John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysics," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995): 119–161.

[34]"Ruse" does not indicate a "deceptive maneuver." It attempts to indicate that the absolute donation of the Father is twofold. The absolute donation of himself to the Son cannot be oblivious to the fact that the Holy Spirit is both eternally present (Spirit of the Father, Holy Spirit within the absolute spirit) and, at the same time, proceeds from the Father and the Son.

[35]Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5,11,12. For an English translation see *The Trinity*, in

whom God "exists in the mode of gift,"[36] although without any sort of addition because there is nothing missing in the original donation. The superabundant character of the donation proper to eternal life need not be imagined as communication of a quantity (e.g., divine essence). The donation, reddition, and confirmation of the gift do not refer to three different modes or moments of the one eternal essence. Rather, they describe the ways of subsisting that are proper to the three divine persons. Eternity's life, then, is not that of an abstract being, but a being who is an "interpersonal presence," an ever-greater communion of love.[37]

It is necessary to hold together both of the aspects of eternal life that have been indicated thus far; first, the perfect, non-extended self-possession and, second, the divine fullness seen in light of an ontology of gift, in order to avoid two erroneous conceptions of eternity.

The first misconception is to think that the donation that characterizes the divine essence could be represented spatially or temporally. Thus, on the one hand, there is the temptation to say, erroneously, that the donation characteristic of eternal life resembles history's sequentiality. This would entail understanding donation, reddition, and confirmation to mean that the Father's gift of himself is followed by the Son's reddition of the gift and that the infinity of this donation is later confirmed in the person of the Holy Spirit. Sequential succession, although required by the *ordo expositionis*, is subservient to the categories of historical progress and thus cannot be ascribed to the Eternal. One must bear in mind that, although there is a *taxis* of the divine processions, they are all simultaneously present to each other. Hence, in the same way that the Father always was with the Son and the Son eternally proceeds from the Father, so the Holy Spirit has always been, and proceeds from the Father and the Son. On the other hand, instead of thinking of divine eternity in linear-sequential terms, one could attempt to conceive it circularly. However, this model is unable to maintain the Father's unique status of primordial origin within the Godhead, for a circle has neither

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Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First series, vol. 3: *On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal treatises, Moral treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

[36]John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 10.

[37]Lamb, "Eternity and Time," 210.

beginning nor end. The simultaneity of God's non-extended self-possession and the giving of the gift cannot be brought under any spatial or chronological representation. Eternity, and time for that matter, needs to be thought ontologically.

The second misinterpretation of the concept of eternity arises from transposing historical becoming onto eternity by identifying each of the divine persons with a particular moment of the historical process. In this regard, the Father (donation) would be seen as the past, the Son (reddition) as the present, and the Holy Spirit (confirmation), as the future.[38] God's eternity, however, since it is the perfect possession of itself in the absolute communion of life, can only be described with one verbal tense, the present.[39]

Successfully avoiding both the Scylla of representing eternity in spatial-temporal terms, and the Charybdis of historicizing eternity, allows us now to grasp the meaning of eternity's life appropriately in terms of donation. If eternity is a type of life, all present to itself inasmuch as it gives all of itself to itself, then God's "I am" is the present of the divine persons, and it can be characterized in terms of "presence" to each other in a "coming from" another, being "with" and "in" the other, and being "for" the other. Obviously, all these prepositions are not a sign of transiency; they rather indicate the subsistence of the hypostases.[40] Hence, as we learn in Christ, it is possible to say that the Son's eternal *nunc* (reddition) contains his always having come from the Father, his being for and with the Father, and his eternal coming from the Father, his eternal being generated. The Father's eternal *nunc* (donation) is characterized by his eternal begetting; he is and remains, *fons et origo totius divinitatis*, the beginning without beginning. The Son is present to him both as the one who is generated and the one whose gratuitous response to

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[38]Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000); Henri de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Fiore* (Paris: Lethielleux; Namur: Culture et vérité, 1979–1981).

[39]Augustine, *Confessions* XI, 13, 16–14, 17.

[40]In this reflection, in addition to Bruaire's work I am also indebted to Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990); id., "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 439–454; Balthasar, *The Last Act*; Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person. In der Trinität bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadenbund. Ich—Du—Wir* (Münster: Aschendorff Münster, 1963).

the Father is and will always be granted. The Holy Spirit's *nunc* has the form of a proceeding from the ineffable relation between the Father and the Son and of confirming gratuitously and superabundantly the gift received. While the Son's procession indicates his eternal origin, "confirmation" suggests the role of the Holy Spirit within the absolute spirit. The confirmation of the gift, from the point of view of the first two hypostases, also indicates the abiding exuberant plenitude of their present. The confirmation of the gift, therefore, does not point to a future that is yet to come, as happens in historical time, but, while showing the absolute gift that God is, it indicates that the eternal, an ineffable communion of love, is ever the same and ever new.

This account of eternity in terms of life and donation could be mistakenly set aside if it were viewed either (1) simply as a representational and not a speculative elucidation, as in Hegel's terminology, or (2) as persisting with the illicit transposition of historical time onto eternity. Quite the contrary: like "circumincession" or "procession," the threefold divine gift (expressed in being-from, -with, -in, and -for the other) does not suggest a spatial or kinetic dynamism. The use of these terms is ontologically and speculatively required by the very nature of the Godhead revealed to us in Christ, the nature of absolute love which gives itself to itself. Divine revelation allows us to see that the expression "coming from" with regard to the Godhead is what then in history may be described as "past," "being for" as future, and these two along with "being with and in" as "present." This is the case because time's form has its ultimate ground in eternity's way of being and not vice versa. Eternity, and not time, is the archetype.[41] The coming-from, being-in and with, and being-for that are proper to the threefold absolute donation will, in creation, acquire the threefold form of time's *nunc*: past, present, future.[42] Now that we have seen that eternity is life and

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[41]We have already treated the impossibility of identifying the three historical moments of time with the three hypostases. In the same way, now it is necessary to note that this understanding of eternity in light of a theology of gift does not apply the three forms of time to each of the divine persons unilaterally. In fact, it is not possible to say that the Father "comes from" anything prior to him. Theological reflection is and remains an approximation to the mystery of God, which always takes place within the unfathomable, absolute love revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

[42]Augustine, *Confessions* XI, 17, 22; XI, 20, 26.

not-extended presence to itself and that these two may be perceived in the light of Christ as divine absolute love that subsists only in the form of the gift of itself to itself, it is possible to see in what sense time's threefold extension is a "passage from one type of life to the other."

3. An ever-new beginning

Time, walled between a beginning that is alien to it and by an end that always appears to frustrate human expectations, tends to be conceived as the succession of three interrelated but discrete moments: past, present, and future. Nevertheless, as Augustine clarifies in his *Confessions*, once one pays closer attention to the nature of time's becoming, it would be more accurate to say that finite time is a present that, unlike eternity's presence to itself, is extended in three moments: the present of the past (memory), the present of the present (sight), and the present of the future (expectation) (XI, 20, 26). Man, who normally considers the past behind him and the future ahead of him, only exists in the present. What happened is already gone, what is forthcoming does not exist yet, and what is present is so only in the form of becoming.[43] Man, says Augustine, remembers what affected his soul and expects new things to come, but this recollection (*tenditur*) and protension (*attendere*) are dimensions of his present. Hence, time is "a certain distension (*distentionem*)" of the human soul (XI, 23, 30), which has been given only the present as the fertile ground in which to exist. Within his present, the soul neglects or treasures memories and expects to obtain or receive what is yet to happen. While, for Augustine, it is a distention of the soul, time's distention is not simply a psychological extension, it also "holds the whole life of man," and "the whole age of the sons of men," that is to say, history (XI, 28, 38). Time, then, is not simply that in which events take place, or the measuring

[43]Augustine also makes clear that the present cannot be quantified and limited to a certain extension with which the rest can then be measured. "If any portion of time be conceived which cannot now be divided into even the minutest particles of moments, this only is that which may be called present; which, however, flies so rapidly from future to past, that it cannot be extended by any delay. For if it be extended, it is divided into the past and future; but the present hath no space" (*Confessions* XI, 15, 20). See also XI, 21, 27.

of those events by the human soul. It is the life of the human soul, its whole distension.

To better grasp what this "distension" means, one should not forget that Augustine's *Confessions* are not simply philosophical reflections. Time regards the soul's distension, but the soul is created in the image of God and called to return and abide in the communion of love that the creator is.[44] Time, created with the cosmos, bears the seed of the eternal within it, and governed by it, is called to return to it.[45] This "return" is not, then, a religious, ultimately extrinsic addition, but time's very nature. Yet, in contrast to Plotinus, Augustine shows that the coming-to-be of time and its return to eternity are not part of a necessary process resulting from a fall from the absolute. The fall is that prideful and free rejection of the divine primordial offer of himself that casts man into total dispersion and insurmountable distraction. The return to the eternal is not gnostic, but the fruit of freely embraced divine grace. It was only when, in his infinite mercy, God took our own flesh upon himself, that access to the Father was granted in a radically greater and unexpected way.[46] Christ, Augustine tells us, is the one in whom one can hope to "be recollected" from the past days, those days, that is, which are no longer present, which saw man's rejection of God and God's wrath against man. "No longer distracted," exhorts Augustine, paraphrasing Philippians 3:12, "but drawn on (*non distensus sed extensus*) to those things which are before us," one can walk "intently (*intentionem*)," pursuing the prize of the heavenly

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[44]For an understanding of God in terms of love, and the Holy Spirit as him in whom the other two are united, see Augustine, *The Trinity*, VI, 5, 7.

[45]Time and expectation indicate the undeniable link existing between time and meaning. See, e.g., T. S. Eliot, *Choruses from 'The Rock'*, in *Collected Poems. 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1976), 162–164. The unity between Augustine's theological and philosophical reading of time neither collapses the natural with the supernatural nor presupposes a modern self-referential concept of nature that is later elevated to a superior state via grace. This unity is the simple acknowledgment of the ontological relation between time and eternity. Meaning is not arbitrarily grafted into time. Rather, it opens up from within time.

[46]"But our very Life descended hither, and bore our death, and slew it, out of the abundance of His own life; and thundering He called loudly to us to return hence to Him into that secret place whence He came forth to us—first into the Virgin's womb, where the human creature was married to Him,—our mortal flesh, that it might not be for ever mortal—and thence 'as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race'" (IV, 12, 19).

calling, where one can "contemplate Thy delights, neither coming nor passing away" (XI, 28, 39).[47] Time, then, is the soul's life—a life created by God, which, after having rejected him, is offered the possibility of being brought back to him by the only mediator between God and man. If one pursues further Augustine's understanding of time from the point of view of the theology of gift outlined in the previous section, it becomes possible to elucidate in what sense eternity is the fulfillment of time because it is its final confirmation.

Time's present, like the eternal, consists of three moments: donation, reddition, and confirmation. Unlike eternity, time is finite, distended, and in perpetual need of being confirmed in existence. The presence of the past in the present can be grasped when one recognizes that the constitutive character of the present is not simply that portion of time in which life takes place. The human present, like the present of the Son, is constantly and completely given to itself. Unlike the intratrinitarian gift, however, the gift to man is entrusted to a finite freedom that can either accept the gift and reciprocate it or, denying its own nature, embrace its own oblivion. The presence of the past in the present is thus the memory of its own foreign origin; the present carries this memory within it and is called not to cast it away in forgetfulness. Thus, memory is more than the remembrance of past events; more importantly, it is the recollection of the origin from which it is continuously brought into existence. Memory, in fact, is the presence of the origin as can be seen expressed in language itself (of which historical languages are a contingent expression), in desire (in the Augustinian sense of thirst for God), and in communion with the human-other. Man is born into them and they are a discreet, clear, and continuous reminder of the presence of the origin in his existence. With Christian revelation, the presence of the origin takes a concrete historical, personal form and memory thus becomes the recollection of Christ's presence and its ensuing history. The lived memory of the present is thus the presence of the Logos, of him in whom man's heart can rest (Mt

[47]As the first eight books of the *Confessions* witness, every human existence, and by extension all of history, is nothing but the unfolding of the drama in which God, having created man in his own image, gives himself so that the human being may be pulled out from the destructive dispersion in which he has cast himself—and thus live and be freely drawn back to the Father.

11:28; Jn 13:25) and thanks to whom the original unity of humankind, shattered by original sin, is reconstituted and inserted in the divine communion of love (Jn 17:6–19).

In order to grasp the meaning of the finite presence of the present in terms of reddition, it is necessary to recognize man's tendency, in his fallen condition, to reject his past, to live without thought of his origin and thus to reject the present. He thus disperses himself in multiplicity, which, although it retains an attraction because beings always remain a sign of eternal beauty, is ultimately misleading because it has been severed from its relation to the eternal.[48] The human being tries to no avail to flee from the present to that moment which is yet to come, or from which he has already emerged. Unwilling to receive himself from his own origin, in the place of a gratuitous reciprocation, man cries out with Faust, "cursed be patience most of all!"[49]

By attending to Christ's presentation of himself as portrayed in the gospel of John, it is possible to discover the meaning of the presence of the present, which we have already examined as reddition. Christ, the one sent, is the one who remains with the Father. The "being" of the finite present, patterned after the Son's childhood, is a "remaining." Like that of the Son, this "remaining" does not mean a pointless stillness, but grateful reception of one's origin and of oneself. Far from being a kind of resignation, the reception that characterizes an authentically lived present is the joyous embrace, even in suffering, of what is given and as it is given, without the attempt to arrogate to oneself some sort of eternity through anxiously planning ahead or nostalgically retreating to a past event.[50] The "remaining" proper to the present is not opposed to moving forward, to growing. Quite the contrary, remaining indicates that man's creativity and fruitfulness, similar to that of the Son, lies in returning the gift of oneself in obedient gratitude. Man's

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[48]See Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, XXIX. For an English translation see *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First series*, vol. 7: *Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff trans. John Gibb and James Innes (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).

[49]Johann W. Goethe, *Goethe's Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 1606.

[50]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 36–37.

labor is and is called to be at its very core grateful reciprocity. Finite time, then, is only present to itself when it abides in the memory of its origin, receives both itself and what is given to it, and gives all of itself in gratitude.

The human present, along with the memory of its origin and the return of the gift, protends itself in the expectation of a final confirmation. Man's present is not only from another, which remains with him, it is also for the other that is yet to come and which presents itself in ever new ways. The future then, more than the realm of what could enter the horizon of the present, is that protension, that being-*for* of man's life which awaits a definitive affirmation of the gift of his own presence.

In light of man's sinfulness and the inexorable approach of his death, the longing for the future confirmation in being would remain a fragile hope springing forth from being's constitutive positivity, had the divinity not revealed in Christ that the Father is rich in mercy. Christ, who, as John Paul II says, "makes the Father present as love and mercy" (DM, 3), shows that time's awaited confirmation is not so much an everlasting, unending life which commences after this life is completed.[51] It is a possibility that can already be proleptically experienced in the present (DM, 4; RH, 10) through the sacramentality of the Church, and that has its final and definitive assurance only in the eschaton.[52] That present time can be confirmed does not mean only that it is thanks to God's mercy that time will eventually be introduced in eternity. If, in the Eternal, confirmation is that which seals God's existence in the mode of gift, in the created order, mercy is the confirmation of the gift, that which makes finite gift be and remain in being. Thus mercy and confirmation of the gift of the present are of one piece because confirmation is the gratuitous re-doubling of the gift that constitutes

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[51]The intertextual citation of the texts by John Paul II are abbreviated as follows, *Dives in Misericordia* (=DM); *Redemptor Hominis* (=RH); *Evangelium Vitae* (=EV).

[52]For the fundamental methodological importance of the concept of experience for John Paul II, see the introduction to his catechesis on human love by Carlo Caffarra in Giovanni Paolo II, *Uomo e donna lo creò. Catechesi sull'amore umano*. (Rome: Città Nuova, 2001): 5–24; Angelo Cardinal Scola, *L'esperienza elementare. La vena profonda del magistero di Giovanni Paolo II* (Genoa: Marietti, 2003). By the "sacramentality of the church," I intend both the sacramentality of the Church herself, and the particular seven sacraments. See Angelo Scola, *Chi è la Chiesa? Una chiave antropologica e sacramentale per l'ecclesiologia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2005).

life; it is the gift given again.[53] Mercy is the gratuitous and powerful "for-giveness" that restores the broken relation with the eternal, which is what makes the finite present be itself.[54]

We saw earlier that in God, the absolute donation, reddition, and confirmation of the gift are not transient moments in eternity but rather indicate the persons in their subsisting relations in light of the absolute gift that God is. In a similar way, when perceived in time, they indicate the life that constitutes the human person. Since the human being is created in the Logos, the donation that forms the present is the constitution of sonship. Created in the Son, God awaits man's free and gratuitous reciprocation of his love.[55] Man's being is, from the very beginning, filial. As such, it is called to accept the gift of itself and to return it, as the incarnate Son does, in eucharistic thankfulness while also awaiting a future, final confirmation. Man, tempted into suspicion of the Father, fell, rejected the gift of his own filiality and, as John Paul II illustrates, instead of satisfying divine fatherhood, squandered his own sonship (DM, 5). Only when the original gift is unforeseeably offered anew can sonship be restored and finite time retrieve its true nature.

The awaited confirmation, the gift given again, for-giveness, is the possibility for the finite present to abide in the eternal present, that one absolute life, all present to itself, that exists in the superabundant gift of itself to itself. This confirmation, offered through Christ, restores the destroyed image of God in man in that it enables him to return the gift of himself and thus be a son who,

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[53]Claude Bruaire, *Pour la métaphysique* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), 251–252.

[54]As John Paul II illustrates, this confirmation of the gift, mercy, has two distinct notes. The first, expressed by the Hebrew term *hesed*, is "in a certain sense a masculine characteristic" and shows that the absolute "*beginning* is a love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal." The second, captured in the word *rahamim*, is "a 'feminine variation' of the masculine fidelity to self" and it specifies further that the "maternal womb" of divine love is "completely gratuitous, not merited" and always determined by a "*readiness* to forgive." *Rahamim* is the plural of *raham*, which means maternal womb (DM, 4, n. 52). Emphasis added. Augustine also adopts this metaphysical concept of mercy. See Théodore Koehler, S.M., "The Significance and Imagery of *misericordia*, *misericors* in the Vocabulary of Medieval Spirituality: From the Vulgate to St. Augustine and in the Liturgy Between 500 and 800," in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt and E. Rozanne Elder (Michigan: The Medieval Institute, 1976): 29–41.

[55]See for example, St. Bernard, *Bernard's sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Chumleigh, Devon: Augustine Pub. Co., 1984).

like the Incarnate Logos, lives in wonder his own filiality. Mercy is the ever-new fulfillment of the gift.

This restored sonship, however, does not simply return man to a prelapsarian state. The return of the gift now has the form of mercy insofar as it is a gratuitous gift of oneself. To understand what this gratuitousness of the finite gift means, we need to see that, as John Paul II says, man's merciful gift, before being towards oneself or others, is to be offered to Christ. The Father "invites man to have 'mercy' on his only Son, the Crucified one." The eternal Father does not desire only that man perform "an act of solidarity" with his crucified Son; he wants man to "show 'mercy' . . . to the Son" (DM, 8). The late Pope does not mean here that Christ needs to be forgiven. More radically, he contends that the return of the gift, that is, man's acceptance of Christ's mercy and the offer of oneself to him, is a true reddition only if, like the Son's, it is essentially gratuitous, superabundant. That is to say, Christ, the redeemer, without predetermining it, seeks a reciprocation whose ultimate reason is Christ himself. He wants to be loved back for his own sake (*reddere*). It is only then that man discovers and experiences the true attachment to himself: not prideful self-enclosure but utterly gratuitous adhesion to the Origin in which and for which he is created. Hence, the mercy offered by the risen crucified Christ and bestowed upon man through his Spirit, an excess of charity (*nimia caritas*) as St. Paul says, while causing man to be and confirming the gift of his existence, seeks and enables man's gratuitous, utterly free, and ever-new reciprocation.[56] The confirmation of the gift, then, enables man's life to pass from the type of life marked by dispersion to one which is lived according to its truth in filial gratitude and obedient fruitfulness, loving the Father with Christ in the Holy Spirit for his sake.

The original contention of this essay was that eternity and time are not contradictory realities. To this end, Plotinus' treatise allowed us to discover that eternity and time can be adequately thought of in terms of life. The outlined theology of gift enabled us to deepen this insight and to discover that eternal life is the absolute triune gift of self in love and that time is a "passage from one type of life to another," that is, to a full participation in the life of the

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[56]The Vulgate translation reads: "Deus qui dives est in misericordia propter nimiam caritatem suam qua delixit nos, et cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo" (Eph 2:4–5).

Eternal One (EV, 38). Eternity and victory, Schelling reminds us, are expressed with the same word in Hebrew. Eternity, then, is not simply an eternal conquest over nothingness; more radically, it is the superabundant and groundless being that reveals itself in Christ as absolute love and as the truth of time, its origin, and its final fulfillment. □

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