

Some favourite moments – mostly on time

p.20

The ontology of personhood demands that we give an account of time. But time cannot be examined with the conceptuality we use to discuss substance. Time is to be understood as an economy of action and passion. Within this economy we can ask who suffers the impact of whom, who is timed and measured by whom. Here we must relate the concept of time to the determination of God to be for humanity. God gives being and recognition to us, and as a result we are able to return recognition to him and to give being and recognition to each other. In the same way we can say that God makes time for us. We are in the time he makes for us, not he in the time we concede him. But though we give him no time, he takes our time and is more at home in it than we are. He takes it from us and returns it to us, redeemed. Time does not relate to one, but to two and more, and so to persons. It is the mode and expression of their relationship. The question of time is a question about God's condescension to suffer and bear us, take our weight, be measured and timed by us, and so bring us to him.

According to the idea of progress, we move forward, as though to meet someone. But, as Zizioulas suggests, our movement can be said to be forward only if it corresponds to something other than itself. It is really God who moves toward us. God moves to find us and meet us, and our movement can be described as such only retrospectively, inasmuch as God takes it to correspond to his movement to us. Only in this way can we speak of a unity of direction, and so of a single unified time.

p.21

What is present to one is not present to another, so there is no canonical version of the present. Any time or present has only a local presence within a conversation. The divine conversation is eternal: nothing interrupts it. It generates for us a world full of openings for conversation. These openings constitute the time we are given for each other. Our time is then one product of the hospitality of God.

p.52-53

Time is a register. There are many registers, and thus many times. The economy of modernity does not succeed in acting as a meta-time, which orders the registers sequentially into one time. We do not stand outside time. Whatever we moderns know, we are not able to order everything into one sequential account and thus know it utterly. We are subject to time, and so we are not its arbitrator. Time does not flow up to us, stop before us, and deposit all things obediently at our feet. Time is recursive. It has no center apparent to us. It is the coming and going of time-schemas, a continuum of registers and their units. It is not simply a forward flow but has "undercurrents, tributaries and reversals, floods and islands." There are many possible things happening all at once, only some of which will prove to be canonical, to have lasting being. The "multiple drafts" model of perception introduced by Dennett reflects this, as does the "scenario spinning" model of consciousness, in which there are, at any point in time, multiple drafts of narrative fragments at various overlapping stages of editing, not in one place but at all places in the brain.

p.53

If all consciousness is consciousness of something, all time is the time of something, or time for something. Time is, of course, not thing, but affordance. It is an opportunity for a happening, which involves more than the individual. Two agents make time for each other. Time may be said to be generated by their meeting and acting together. Discursivity and diffuse intentionality are required to understand agency as plural, the work of more than one person. Discursivity describes the turn-taking, or alternation, that characterizes conversation and human relating in general. Diffuse intentionality relates to the expert audience of commentators, whose participation gives mere movement the significance of the action of persons.

p.96

When time is used to name the relationship of God and Israel, it must be understood to be determined by their movements toward each other. Israel grows into the space God provides, for God on the trinitarian conception is not only agent but also the host and enabler of all other agents. It is because God came to Israel that it can be said that Israel comes to God. Then we can say that time is nothing but the determination of God for Israel and Israel for God, and this is the ground of possibility for a world of agency.

p.139

Time, on this theological definition, is the union of God's work and its fruit, time complete with its outcome. The eschatological economy of God, which we have already introduced once as the Sabbath, cannot be interrupted by the other economies of time created by rival lordships. The seventh day creates these six days. He creates for us these defined economies of time in which we may increasingly participate in the fullness of the resurrection, the eschatological economy of God.

Since the Son did come in the single person of the God-man, time was redeemed and none of this waiting was in vain. The man who is with God can count time and tell history complete with its end.

p.147

In the Jerusalem temple one lamb is burned, in the morning, and one in the evening. It is an unceasing event that generates time, just as the sabbath generates the days that precede it.

p.170-71

In these last two chapters I have argued that Jesus makes a better performance of the world than does the self-professedly secular world. The secular world puts in a fallen and failing performance, he a perfecting and enduring performance. He does this world-performance necessarily in the face of the world and against the world. He does it on the cross. He is God and man. He is man. We are not yet truly human. True human beings are the creature, servant, and friend of God. We are not yet this. Jesus can do us better than we can do ourselves. We cannot do anything that Jesus cannot repeat and do better. He can take away our claim to have done something new and

unrepeatable, which would put us decisively beyond God and make us autonomous. He can put in a performance of greater virtuosity that shows that all our doing is just a failure of his doing. He mimics and portrays us, both in our present truculence and misery and in the glory that we will receive from him. On the cross he plays us as we are, and as we will be, with him. These chapters have offered an account of atonement that does not rest on a choice between models that requires a resultant separate work of hermeneutics and epistemology, with further separate discussion of the appropriateness of such models for today, and thus of the issue of time and modernity. Rather, I have attempted to provide a theology of time in which time is what God provides for us. God ushers us into his time. He brings his servant-community up into the skill of receiving time and giving his time. His time describes and contains the time of modernity. These chapters have prepared us for the final chapters of this book, in which our claim to be the knower and measurer, because the actor and creator, of our world is dethroned.

p.173

I will now lay out two contrasting versions of history and economies of time. One of these is broadly the history the West tells of itself. This is a history of growing autonomy from God; it is the story of secularization. The other is a salvation history in which God is readying humankind for relationship with himself. It insists that, despite itself, modernity also has its part in this movement. This is not new, of course. These two economies of time are the two cities described by Augustine ...

p.181

To read Scripture is to be equipped with an additional means by which the world may make itself visible to us. It provides us with a greater band-width, enhancing our ability to receive the complexity of the world. Through Scripture we may follow the trajectory of our acts and so see them together with their outcome and see relationships in their completeness.

p.197

If God is faithful, what has been good for Israel may be good for us too. Israel, and the church of any earlier generation, may then be the medium of our instruction. Our age may be measured against other ages, even when other decisions and dispensations held good. This faithfulness makes God responsible to the law, which, as we have seen, expresses the narrative and the character of his relationship with his people. Without the conception that God is faithful to his own rulings, there is no set of his promises that can be quoted back to him by which he is content that we hold him to account. If God is not understood to be bound by his own faithfulness to his own previous rulings, and so as the guarantor of the law that enables *paideia*, the possibility of learning from previous generations is gone. If God is understood only as wielder of absolute and unaccountable power, there can be no comparisons between law in one age and law in another, and there is no possibility of *paideia*. With no understanding of law as *paideia*, history is not purposeful. It is just the passing of time, understood in terms of some unspecified concept of development. Without a theological concept of law and covenant, *paideia* evaporates into the idea of progress.

p.202-3

The question of time is, Whose time is it? Who can measure and out-measure whom? God's time for humankind and being for humankind are not what humankind inflicts on God or what God must suffer involuntarily, but is God's determination to be for human beings and with them. Time must be understood not as non-personal substance (or equally, absence), but as the action of God who has time for us.

p.220

Scripture is an interface with an orthopedic function: it redetermines us from within. Scripture is a body prepared for us, a being located and sheltered within a community and a world.

p.238-39

Theology, by contrast, is an address that intends to make us answerable to one another, responsible for bringing one another into being, and making us what we are not yet. Theology is a mode of political hermeneutics, a practice of interrupting the simple statements the world makes about itself, by which it always seems to want to close itself down, and of providing complex statements that keep the world open. Theology is a work of intercession and advocacy, of calling on one another, and on God, to give the world more time. Theology is a mode of politics, and Christianity the best mode of politics, because the God of Jesus Christ is our ruler and under his rule we may flourish.

This requires several other claims. One is that Christians participate in the rule of the one ruler. Another is that political talk is inseparable from ethics talk, and ethics talk is inseparable from political talk.' A third and larger claim must be made, one that was once a commonplace of Platonic philosophy: that politics (the polis) and ethics (what to do) and psychology (talk of our mind, emotions, and soul, and therefore also our religious inclinations), and cosmology and theology all relate one to another. These claims represent a range of tasks for theology.

p.245-46

God intends to admit new members to the council and assembly of heaven. This assembly will then govern a combined kingdom of heaven and earth, in which we will be, not divine, but for the first time properly *human*, creatures made holy. This assembly is gathered as an earthly ecclesia that inducts its members into the skill of judging and giving recognition. Part of the skill of judging is the skill of advocacy, the office of defense counsel, which puts the case for mercy. These trainee judges – the saints – must be taught the skills of entering a plea, interceding, *prayer*. They must learn to argue on behalf of those who are not yet holy that a little more time is needed, and to argue on behalf of the oppressed that their release come now, without delay. They must be able to say both "Have mercy on us – give us more time," and "Come Lord Jesus – give no more time to the oppressors." These advocates must be able to say which plea is at any time appropriate. The new Christian action is that of the members of the assembly that God gathers around himself. This training starts as the exercise of self-government of the church. The people of the world will come to this assembly of saints for justice.