

# What is Time? Philosophical and Eucharistic Insights

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## Abstract

This paper takes the models of time, A-theory and B-theory, from the work of J. E. McTaggart and considers them in relation to the understanding of time implied by the Eucharist. It is suggested that neither theory is able to respond to both the anamnestic and eschatological pulls of the liturgy.

## Keywords

Philosophy of time, Eucharist, McTaggart, liturgy, liturgical time, anamnesis, eschatology

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will examine the principles of approaches to time derived from the philosophical work of J. E. McTaggart, classically titled A-theory and B-theory, and the questions of the relationship between the perception of time and its ontology, as well as some of the difficulties associated with these models.

I will then formulate a “eucharistic time,” seeking to explore the place of the mysteries of Christ—both past and historic, and future and eschatological—within the celebration, and how that must engage with the ontology of time. I will highlight a number of major challenges for the philosophical models, such that the models and fundamental theological positions are not fully compatible. I will posit a theological model of the nature of time, based upon an eschatological lens, that allows the differing approaches to each to contribute to a deeper understanding of the fullness of time as revealed in Christ.

## 2. A Philosophical Basis

Time, and its nature, has been considered by philosophers since at least the days of Aristotle. Before considering current models and their implications, the key questions surrounding the perception of time and fatalism should be considered.

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## 2.1. Perception of Time

Can time itself be perceived? Or merely events that occur in time? As temporal awareness is not tied to a sense, it is not obvious that time has a separate identity, but without understanding how we perceive time the answer is not straightforward.<sup>1</sup>

It would generally be accepted that we perceive the world in the “now.” That is, once something has passed, we do not perceive it; we only have a memory of the perception of it. Strictly speaking, this is not quite true as we only perceive past events, albeit sometimes at only very small intervals, as the information takes a finite amount of time to reach us. For most purposes, the “now” serves as a sufficient approximation.<sup>2</sup>

Greater precision can be given by speaking in terms of perceiving things once an observer enters within the “light cone,” such that the information involved has time to reach and affect her.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, in any objective sense, the present can have no duration; however in human perception one may work in terms of a “specious present,” extended in time over a short interval that is still perceived as “present.”<sup>4</sup>

Evidence from the physical sciences suggests that time itself is symmetrical: “the laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future.”<sup>5</sup> Stephen Hawking argues it is a consequence of the symmetries in matter that such a symmetry should also exist in time. Yet it is clear that in our perception, time has a very clear direction: from past to present to future. It is unclear how we perceive the ordering of time, whether this is a result of a process of recognition of the temporal locations of the perceptions, or of a deduction based upon the content of the perception, such that causality makes sense.<sup>6</sup>

The subjective view of time—that is, time as we perceive it—cannot be taken simply as the entire objective reality of time. The problem of defining the present moment suggests these two ideas are not precisely coincident. Nonetheless, an observer must work within her perceptions, including that of an asymmetry to time.

## 2.2. Fatalism

Much consideration of the workings of time itself is motivated by a concern to address whether or not future events are avoidable, and whether we can freely act, or are bound

1. Daniel C. Dennett and Marcel Kinsbourne, “Time and the Observer: The Where and When of Consciousness in the Brain,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 15, no. 2 (June 1992) 183–201 (188–90).
2. Robin Le Poidevin, “The Experience and Perception of Time,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015) para. 16, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/time-experience/>.
3. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (London: Bantam Press, 1993) 25–28.
4. Le Poidevin, “Experience and Perception,” paras. 9–15; Dennett and Kinsbourne, “Time and the Observer,” 183–84.
5. Hawking, *Brief History*, 144.
6. Le Poidevin, “Experience and Perception,” paras. 21–25; D. H. Mellor, *Real Time II*, International Library of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1998) 66–69, 118–24.

to predetermined outcomes. Ned Markosian formulates the following typical argument:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) There exist propositions in the present concerning everything that might happen in the future.
- (2) Every proposition is true or false.
- (3) If (1) & (2), then there exists a set of true propositions predicting the whole future.
- (4) If (3), then whatever will happen in the future is unavoidable, and the future is determined.

Whilst some thinkers are satisfied to accept the determinism of this argument, it is unsatisfactory to most. The most vulnerable point within the argument is (2). The so-called “Principle of Bivalence” given here presumes that every proposition must have a truth value for all time, when in fact we may conclude that at a given moment, it may have no truth value, or is indeterminate. Thus, for a proposition  $p$ , a time  $t$ , and a truth value  $v$ , rather than a tenseless view of semantics saying  $p$  is  $v \forall t$ , as with statement (2) above, we may instead take a tensed view, that  $p$  is  $v$  at  $t$ .<sup>8</sup> The question of the possibilities of the future is evidently significant in understanding what time itself is. Christian theology, wishing to speak coherently of human free will and also of divine eschatological fulfillment, cannot ignore this tension.

### 2.3. Models of Time

Whilst different thinkers and writers have posited different understandings of time, perhaps one of the most radical, and influential upon subsequent thinkers, was that proposed by J. E. McTaggart in 1908, where he argued that time does not exist.<sup>9</sup> McTaggart argues that positions in time are determined in one of two ways: past/present/future properties, or earlier/simultaneous with/later relations. The latter is clearly a permanent distinction. He terms the series of positions labelled by the former measure the “A series,” and the latter the “B series.”<sup>10</sup> For McTaggart, time cannot be determined by a B series alone, for it precludes any sense of change, and gives only an order of events.<sup>11</sup> McTaggart then attempts to show that an A series is contradictory, because, he argues, it is necessary for any event to have all three properties, past, present and future: “If M [an arbitrary event]

7. Ned Markosian, “Time,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014) para. 3, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time/>.

8. *Ibid.*, paras. 6–7.

9. J. Ellis McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” *Mind* 17, no. 68 (1908) 457–74. The continued influence of his ideas is highlighted by an essay of McTaggart’s republished under the same title in Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath, eds., *The Philosophy of Time*, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 23–24. Reference here is made to the article in *Mind*.

10. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” 458.

11. *Ibid.*, 459–62.

is past, it has been present and future.”<sup>12</sup> Now, it is claimed, by the principle of identity, M must possess all these properties for all time, otherwise it is a different event at those times when it does not, because it would have different properties. But, he continues, these are incompatible, and the only way to resolve this issue presumes the existence of an A series, leading to either an infinite set of A series or a vicious circle. He concludes, “it is clear that there is a vicious circle if we endeavor to assign the characteristics of present, future and past by the criterion of the characteristics of present, past and future,” and for McTaggart, there is no other mechanism available to assign these parameters.<sup>13</sup>

McTaggart’s characterization of the ways to approach time has been far more influential than his conclusion, and it is commonplace to describe time in terms of an approach dependent on either McTaggart’s A, or B series. The A theorist accepts McTaggart’s claim that there is no time without the A series whilst rejecting his objection as contradictory, and instead argues that there is a fundamental difference between statements of the form “*x* is *F*” and “*x* was *F*.” In contrast, the B theorist claims that any talk about an event being past, for example, is merely a convenient shorthand for saying it was earlier than now, and rejects any sense of time passing.<sup>14</sup>

The consequence of these differing approaches in constructing a model of time lie in the objectivity, or not, of the divisions into past, present and future, where B theorists—in the majority amongst philosophers—deny the divisions’ objective reality.<sup>15</sup> I shall consider here two principal models: presentism, which derives from A-theory; and eternalism, from B-theory. I shall also note an approach that can be termed a “growing world” theory, derivative of presentism, which appears to be somewhere between the two.

Presentism is characterized by the principle, “It is always true that only present objects exist.” Whilst this may be “common sense,” and ties in with the way that time is perceived, this view is not without its issues.<sup>16</sup> From empirical science, recognition must be given to the “relativity of simultaneity” that is consequent from the Special and General Theories of Relativity. This is to say that whether or not two events are simultaneous is frame relative, which has obvious implications for any claim for an objective present.<sup>17</sup>

Presentism is also non-trivial regarding statements that span time. Different philosophers resolve this question in different ways. One approach allows the use of temporally unrestricted existential statements. Another approach is to address all propositions about the past or future by translating them into the form *P*(*x* is *y*) or *F*(*x* is *y*) respectively, but there remain difficulties in how this is grounded.<sup>18</sup> In the end, such statements, in a strict

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12. Ibid., 468.

13. Ibid.

14. Markosian, “Time,” sec. 5.

15. Dean Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time*, ed. Craig Callender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 164.

16. Markosian, “Time,” sec. 6.

17. Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold,” 165; Hawking, *Brief History*, 21–22. For a more precise formulation, see Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) chap. 17.

18. For *P* as “it was the case that” and *F* as “it will be the case that.” See M. Joshua Mozerky, “Presentism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time*, ed. Craig Callender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 127, 129–42.

presentism, must be regarded as false unless they can be paraphrased without a commitment to the past or future.<sup>19</sup>

An alternative view, that does not completely abandon A-theory, is to allow the existence, in some abstract or ghostly way, of past events. In such a growing world theory—so-called because this ghostly set of past events is ever-growing—there remains a distinction between past and present, in that past events exist, but are in some sense not happening, as compared to present events on the frontier of this growing world. This is not without problems of its own, in that it requires a continued existence for objects that have been destroyed, yet without a spatial component.<sup>20</sup>

Eternalism, deriving from B-theory, takes a different approach. In this model, change becomes the “difference between successive temporal parts” of an object or event, and the totality of a thing or action does not exist at any temporal point, but as a “worm” running through time.<sup>21</sup> B-theory says that there is no objective distinction between past, present and future, and so eternalism affirms equality of existence across the three—clearly carrying with it a distinction between “exists” in the sense of temporal location and in the ontological sense.<sup>22</sup> In this model, there is no priority given to any particular given moment.

## 2.4. Consequences for the Divine?

William Lane Craig has attempted to consider some of the implications of these models for theology.<sup>23</sup> Whilst his sketch is simplified and does not consider the implications of the different models beyond McTaggart’s initial characterizations, it is useful to consider some of the possible repercussions before turning to the understanding of time as expressed liturgically. Craig’s conclusions emphasize the “now” of A-theory models, and the equality of moments in B-theory models. Craig concludes that there are essentially four options when considering God and time, as shown in Table 1. Different emphases can give differing conclusions here, but Craig’s approach indicates well the possible range.

Craig finds issues with (1) and (4), judging the latter “bizarre” as it requires God to be composed of temporal parts; and the former, “problematic” as he concludes it requires some sort of “eternal-temporal simultaneity relation.”<sup>24</sup> Craig’s preferred options are (2)

19. Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold,” 168. Some philosophers would seek to use the label “quasi-true” for such statements that would be otherwise true; see Mozerky, “Presentism,” 141–42.

20. Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold,” 170.

21. Sider is careful to observe how this partiality is perfectly normal speech regarding objects in spatial terms, and thus we should not be concerned to apply it temporally, though he accepts the need to formulate it in a three-dimensional manner also; see Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010) 56–62 (56).

22. Markosian, “Time,” sec. 6.

23. William Lane Craig, “Time, Eternity, and Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls, Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 596–613.

24. *Ibid.*, 601.

Table 1. God and time.

|                 | God is Timeless                                                                   | God is Temporal                                                                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A-Theory</b> | (1) God is timeless, events in time have properties past, present or future       | (2) God is temporal, events in time have properties past, present or future       |
| <b>B-Theory</b> | (3) God is timeless, time is determined by relations “earlier than,” “later than” | (4) God is temporal, time is determined by relations “earlier than,” “later than” |

Adapted from Craig, “Time, Eternity, and Eschatology,” 600.

and (3), though both have implications for classical Christian doctrines of God. Option (3), as Craig notes, includes God within time, and so precludes the classical doctrines of simplicity and immutability in God. Option (2) has implications for the understanding of the doctrine of creation, at least in the sense of an initial creation, but the temporally unboundedness of the universe or of space-time involved may be more consistent with the ideas found in physical science.<sup>25</sup>

Within Christian theology, the biggest question here must stem from the Incarnation—with which God, in the person of Jesus, takes on humanity, and so temporality. This does not require that God was always subject to time—it may be understood as a part of the same kenotic process as the taking of flesh, or as a consequence thereof, but we must rule out any divide that *a priori* prevents God choosing to participate in time. Craig gives almost no consideration to the impact of the Christ-event, yet the theologian cannot ignore it.

2.5. Eternity

Alongside time, there stands eternity. The term covers two overlapping semantic ranges: atemporality, and everlastingness.<sup>26</sup> There can be a lack of clarity, or of precise distinction, in theological and popular usage.

There has been much consideration of the idea within the classical Christian framework,<sup>27</sup> though more recent philosophers have made use of the distinct understandings of time posited by McTaggart. Some posit that from the point of view of eternity, time follows a B series, with which the eternal has no temporal relation, though for others this requires events to continue in the present whilst being in the past.<sup>28</sup> A similar range of views has been developed based upon an A series model of time.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, all these views begin with time, and try to extrapolate what it might mean to exist beyond time. The theologian might respond by questioning whether this is the best place to start, or

25. Hawking, *Brief History*, 134–41.  
26. Paul Helm, “Eternity,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014) para. 2, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/eternity/>.  
27. *Ibid.*, paras. 3–16.  
28. *Ibid.*, paras. 18–29.  
29. *Ibid.*, paras. 30–40.

whether we should start from the eternal, and consider what time means in relation to this.

### 3. Anamnesis: Eucharistic Time

Accepting the traditional Christian eucharistic realism, it seems there are three principal elements to time as contained within the Eucharist. First, past; the Eucharist is understood to be in some sense related to the historical events of Christ's Passion. Secondly, the future; just as the Eucharist is considered related to the historical, it is also associated with the future eschatological fulfillment of all things. Finally, the Eucharist is also undoubtedly an event that takes place in the present.

#### 3.1. *The Eucharist and the Past*

The historicity of the main events of Christ's earthly life, including the events at the end of it, is axiomatic to orthodox Christianity. Whilst not the exclusive preserve of any particular tradition, reference back to the sacrifice of the Cross has been particularly influential in the development of eucharistic theology in the Western Church, in particular in relation to the question of the understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice.

A disputed question in eucharistic theology for many centuries has been over the exact nature of what happens in the celebration of the sacrament, i.e. of what anamnesis implies. It is undisputed that Christ is not sacrificed again in the Eucharist, and that he has offered "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction."<sup>30</sup>

Whilst one can resort to memorialism here, the broader tradition of the Church has tended to say that what is done in the Eucharist contains sign and symbol of the saving events of the life of Christ, and thus in some way the sacrament presents the Christ-event. The tradition also claims that this is not merely subjective but has an objective reality. If it is simply subjective, then it is impossible to deduce anything about the nature of time from it. In contrast, if it is objective then it necessarily speaks of the real nature of existence, including time.

Thomas Aquinas has been one of the most influential thinkers in the Western approach to this question. It is clear that he argued in favor of an understanding of "a commemorative sign which elicits the subjective recall of the historical passion."<sup>31</sup> Yet one cannot ignore that which Edward Kilmartin calls "axiomatic" for Aquinas, that "the historical living of Christ is really present in all sacramental celebrations of the Church."<sup>32</sup> This interaction is at the center of the question of time and the Eucharist.

Some thinkers, inspired by Aquinas, understand the presence of the saving mysteries within the Eucharist as a consequence of them being removed from time. Others reject this approach, and despite recognizing the independence of the meaning of an event from

30. Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 402.

31. Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 254.

32. Ibid.

historical circumstance, suggest that the event cannot yet be abstracted away from its circumstances.<sup>33</sup>

The Thomist would also seek to argue that the saving acts of Christ exercise an “efficient causality” in the liturgical sanctification of believers.<sup>34</sup> For the liturgical act to be effective in configuring the participants to Christ, the instrument of God’s action (Christ) must be simultaneously present with the agent (God) and the effect—that is, the configuration to Christ of the participants.<sup>35</sup>

This approach rejects a merely experiential understanding of what is happening in the Eucharist and requires a wider perspective. However, as I noted regarding the perception of time, the way in which we perceive time is limited, and risks incompleteness. We are not bound, therefore, to say that the events of Christ’s salvific acts cannot be present because we perceive them to be past.

This is not compatible with any theory of time that does not allow past events ontological existence. We cannot accept an overly simple presentist model of time. If the past, saving mysteries of Christ are able to be effective causes in the life of the present church’s prayer in the Eucharist, then they have an enduring reality. This is a particular instance of the general question of how to process any cross-temporal event in A-theory models, but given the claimed consequences, it is of the greatest significance.

Are these simply metaphysical speculations, or are they grounded in the *theologia prima* of the liturgy?<sup>36</sup> In most anaphoras, despite varying constructions and emphases, anamnesis of the saving events of Christ plays a central part. The texts of many widely used models of anaphoras depend on a sense of mystery, and so we have “remember his offering . . . [to] proclaim his mighty resurrection”<sup>37</sup> or “celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead. . . .”<sup>38</sup> Amongst the most widely used models of anaphoras, none is much more explicit.

Yet each prayer is conscious of a present act predicated not on the historical passion, but a present offering of the Eucharist—the prayers only make sense through the present offering. As such, the Roman Canon continues “we . . . offer to your glorious majesty . . . this pure victim,”<sup>39</sup> not as a fresh sacrifice, but a *re-presenting* of the same. From this we may see that the Eucharist requires an openness to the making present of the past in the here and now. This necessitates the continuing reality of the past event; otherwise it is a new sacrifice, with a new Christ being offered afresh.

This requires attention to be given to what is meant by eucharistic realism. So far, I have focused on the Eucharist as sacrifice that makes present the sacrifice of the Cross.

33. Ibid., 307–13. Kilmartin cites F. Pratzner as an example of the former view, and Brian McNamara of the latter.

34. Ibid., 315.

35. Ibid., 315–16.

36. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 74–75.

37. Eucharistic Prayer A in Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000) 186.

38. The Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I in *CTS New Sunday Missal: People’s Edition with the New Translation of the Mass* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011) 601.

39. Ibid.

Central to this is the sense of the eucharistic elements as the true Body of Christ. Yet as Henri de Lubac has comprehensively shown, in the early and medieval church, it was also common, if not normative, to speak of the church as the *corpus verum* and the sacrament as the *corpus mysticum*, before these terms became switched.<sup>40</sup>

To understand the church as becoming the *corpus verum* in the Eucharist, by reception of the *corpus mysticum* of the sacrament, it is necessary to reconsider how time and the Eucharist are interacting. But there is always an ambiguity present. Recalling Augustine's instructions to his catechumens, "Be what you see, and receive what you are,"<sup>41</sup> whichever way around these terms are used, there remains a continuity between them: to call one "*mysticum*" is not to stop calling it "*corpus*." Furthermore, the offering of the Eucharist is the union of the Church's offering, symbolized in the offering of bread and wine but signifying the offering of the whole, with Christ's own, both now in the present, and historically, and into eternity. It is the whole *corpus Christi* that is offered, temporal distinctions becoming meaningless.

Another approach that opens this question further is Odo Casel's, which was highly influential at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>42</sup> Casel argues that both the work of Christ in the saving mysteries and the Church's ritual action are, properly speaking, liturgy. But they are liturgies with the same content, the former with the action present in the ordinary manner, the latter by way of mystery.<sup>43</sup> For Casel, "mystery" is the means of God engaging with humanity, not simply in the sense of something hidden, but the divine action "which proceeds from eternity."<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, it is something that is revealed, chiefly in the person of Christ, and thus within time.<sup>45</sup> Thus within the mysteries of the sacraments, as given to the Church by Christ, the mysteries of Christ's saving works are revealed in those who receive them: "the *mysterium* is there, itself like a word to be seen."<sup>46</sup> As Casel puts it elsewhere: "The Mystery is a holy cultic action in which a *reality of our salvation becomes present*: by carrying out this rite the worshipping community becomes involved in this saving deed, and so salvation comes upon them."<sup>47</sup> However, as Guiver notes, Casel does not establish *how* the mystery is made present objectively.<sup>48</sup>

40. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, trans. Gemma Simmonds and Richard Price (London: SCM, 2006).

41. *Homily* 272; PL38 1247–48, my translation.

42. See, chiefly, Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1999). Casel's editor, Burkhard Neunheuser, argues that *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, especially in light of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (1965), takes up Casel's ideas, particularly in paragraph 7. See Burkhard Neunheuser, "Odo Casel in Retrospect and Prospect," *Worship* 50, no. 6 (November 1976) 494–504.

43. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 38–40.

44. *Ibid.*, 9.

45. *Ibid.*, 10.

46. *Ibid.*, 41–42.

47. Odo Casel, "Mysterienfrömmigkeit," *Bonner Zeitschrift für Theologie und Seelsorge* 4 (1927) 101–117 (104); quoted in George Guiver, *Pursuing the Mystery: Worship and Daily Life as Presences of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 66. Emphasis added.

48. Guiver, *Pursuing the Mystery*, 72–74. In the remainder of his book, Guiver attempts to offer solutions.

### 3.2. The Eucharist and the Future

The Eucharist does not only look back to the past events of Christ's Passion, death and resurrection; it claims the same relation to the future events of the eschaton as to those past events. The anamnesis of the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom places all these events together under the same governing perfect tense verb:

Remembering therefore this our Savior's command and that has been done for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, the Second and glorious Coming again.<sup>49</sup>

This liturgical statement implies some ontological equality between past and future events that we must take into consideration when seeking to understand the nature of time.

The connection of the Eucharist to the eschatological banquet is prominent in much Orthodox theology. Alexander Schmemmann suggests the entirety of the liturgy is pointed in that direction, from the opening benediction "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. . ." pointing the way for the journey that the liturgy undertakes; through to the final blessing with the intercession of the whole company of heaven and the dismissal.<sup>50</sup>

Schmemmann focuses this attention most at the anaphora, and suggests the consecration of the elements is because of the church's entrance into the eschaton. There in bread and wine, humanity's true food, the body and blood of Christ, is unveiled in the eschatological state.<sup>51</sup> It follows that, as a consequence of a belief in the real presence of Christ in the consecrated elements, the eschaton is a real event.

It is of course possible to say that this final fulfillment is atemporal, as some Thomists would suggest has also become true of the historical events. Indeed, it may be most correct to speak of it as a timeless eternity. Yet, as those past events have done, it must have an interaction at a moment in time with the events of time to impinge on them. This is a consequence of the Incarnation, but also, otherwise, "the first things" will not have "passed away."<sup>52</sup>

The Christian creedal certainty that Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" is a challenge to any comprehensive rejection of fatalism.<sup>53</sup> Whilst it does not require that all events between the present and this second coming be fixed, it does anticipate that the ultimate end has been determined. This changes the parameters required of a model of time substantially, compared to an approach where indeterminism is absolute.

49. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, *Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία του εν Άγιοις Πατρός Ἡμών Ἰωαννου του Χρυσοστομου* = *The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 33; "has been done" translates the Greek γεγενημένων, which is in the perfect tense.

50. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004) 27.

51. *Ibid.*, 37, 11–22.

52. Cf. Rev 21:4.

53. *The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, as given in Church of England, *Common Worship*, 173.

If we are to claim a timeless quality to the historical and eschatological elements of the Christ-event, then we must understand what we might mean by this. As Dumitru Staniloae notes, “eternity cannot be simply an unchangeable substance,” for otherwise God must be essentially dead. It is necessary for eternity to support the inexhaustible love subsisting between the Divine Persons.<sup>54</sup> Thus to say that the Passion has become timeless is not to place it into an ever-unchanging stasis, for it remains part of the dynamic divine life. Nor does this isolate it altogether from time, for to do so would imply that God, as the Eternal, is isolated from time. Yet the very nature of the whole Christ-event, as the pinnacle of salvation history, reveals that the Eternal God forms loving relationships with his creatures—who of their very essence are bound by time.

It can, therefore, be said that it is of no great significance whether or not, properly speaking, the events of the Passion and the Eschaton are “timeless” and taken into eternity. They must retain the same ability to effect change in time whatever their status. This requires an ontological existence, and to have salvific effect, they must be present causes. This does not necessarily exclude a model of time based on either the A series or the B series. In the case of the former, it must precipitate some real interaction of past events into the present, either through a channel of eternal timelessness or by being made directly present. For the latter, attention must be given to the priority of the present, for the Eucharist, as with the other Christian sacraments, makes the claim that it is at a particular moment in a distinctive way that these events are made present, not simply in a general sense. This ultimately suggests that a further dimension to time is required, where the eternal and the temporal interact.

#### 4. A Liturgical Theology of Time?

For Aidan Kavanagh, “the liturgy needs time rather than time needs liturgy.”<sup>55</sup> He concludes this is as a result of the interaction between time and the liturgy. I have here explored how, when properly understood, liturgical action is not changing time in any way, but instead revealing its “true nature . . . [not as] an endless succession of bare moments but a purposeful thrust home towards its holy Source.”<sup>56</sup>

This understanding fundamentally challenges both A- and B-models, if they are seen alone. Whether the succession of moments is related by A relations or B properties, they must be understood as more than just moments, and that the interconnection of these moments, both to other moments and to eternity, cannot be ignored, and that these interconnections are not simply those of sequence. The past moments of the Christ-event are made present in the celebration of the Eucharist, alongside the future moments when the eschatological will become fully realized. In what Emma O’Donnell calls the “Liturgical Present,”<sup>57</sup> we see “Past, present and future interpenetrate and touch upon eternity.”<sup>58</sup>

54. Dumitru Staniloae, *Eternity and Time* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2001) 1–2.

55. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo, 1982) 24.

56. Ibid.

57. Emma O’Donnell, *Remembering the Future: The Experience of Time in Jewish and Christian Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015) 149–52.

58. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000) 60.

For O'Donnell, Joseph Ratzinger's claim here is not substantially different to that of Kavanagh, in that the liturgy gains meaning from time. It is also not just that the present indicates past and future (A), or moments which are earlier and later than the present (B), but that those moments, those times are contained within the present within the liturgical celebration.<sup>59</sup> More, the liturgical celebration is the means by which "the Christian is delivered from the tyranny of linear time."<sup>60</sup> Into what, then, is this a deliverance?

It would be easy to suggest that the alternative to linear time is cyclical time, which was some ancient philosophers' preferred solution.<sup>61</sup> Yet this is not satisfactory either. The Christian claim is that the Christ-event is "once for all,"<sup>62</sup> and it recognizes creation as having a temporal beginning and looks for an end to all history.<sup>63</sup> This claim is incompatible with the idea of a continuously repeating cycle. Something more is required.

For Patrick Regan, "the Spirit brings the time of the world to perfection by making the fullness of time present within it."<sup>64</sup> This calls for a fundamentally eschatological turn. Schmemmann similarly suggests that within the liturgical action, time is "eschatologically transparent," serving as a continual reminder "of the ultimate and great 'Day of the Lord' which is coming in time."<sup>65</sup> It is because of this eschatological significance, and for Schmemmann, only because of it, that Christian worship takes its proper function: "The unique . . . function of worship in the life of the Church and in theology is to convey a sense of this eschatological reality."<sup>66</sup>

Once we see all time as revealed to be what it truly is, through this eschatological lens that the liturgical celebration has placed before us, it no longer makes sense to speak in terms of any model based on sequences as the unique descriptor of the true nature of time, irrespective of how the moments in such a sequence relate to one another. As Schmemmann puts it, "what eschatology does is to hold together things which otherwise are broken up and treated as separate events occurring at different points in a time sequence."<sup>67</sup> Thus whether we speak primarily of the Eucharist as re-presenting a past event, or as anticipating the eschaton, does not matter, for these become one.

The "unified sense of time" that flows from this eschatological perspective removes all distinction of past, present and future, allowing them to interpenetrate one another and give meaning to one another. And just as it makes no sense in this framework to speak of a moment as past or present or future, nor does it make sense to speak of it as earlier or

59. O'Donnell, *Remembering the Future*, 149.

60. Patrick Regan, "Pneumatological and Eschatological Aspects of Liturgical Celebration," *Worship* 51, no. 4 (July 1977) 332–50 (349).

61. Aristotle, for example. See Catherine Rau, "Theories of Time in Ancient Philosophy," *The Philosophical Review* 62, no. 4 (October 1953) 514–25 (517).

62. See 1 Pet 3:18; Heb 9:26.

63. Karl Rahner, "Theological Observations on the Concept of Time," in *Theological Investigations Vol. 11* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 289.

64. Regan, "Pneumatological and Eschatological Aspects," 349.

65. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987) 56.

66. Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Eschatology," *Sobornost (Incorporating Eastern Churches Review)* 7, no. 1 (1985) 6–14 (10).

67. *Ibid.*

later than another, for “memory and eschatological anticipation link together the disparate fragments of temporality into a unity, creating a unique liturgical present which is eschatologically—and anamnically—transparent.”<sup>68</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This exploration has shown that, ultimately, an understanding of time motivated by the theological realities of the Eucharist is incompatible with a simple adoption of one of the philosophical models proposed that stem from the work of McTaggart. The eschatological perspective required by the liturgy requires more to exist than is offered by variants of A-theory. And yet the particularity of the moment in which the celebration occurs overwhelms the eternalism of B-theory. From a present moment, time becomes, through the liturgical celebration, transparent, with past and future becoming one with present as the fullness of time is revealed. What the liturgical celebration reveals is not simply the nature of the linear time we normally perceive but instead a broader horizon in which the divine perspective and the human come together to reveal reality more truly, and mere models are transcended by the fundamental nature of being.

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68. O'Donnell, *Remembering the Future*, 152.