

4-1-1990

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### Recommended Citation

Senior, Thomas (1990) "Incarnation And Timelessness," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol7/iss2/2>

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# INCARNATION AND TIMELESSNESS

Thomas D. Senor

In this paper I present and defend two arguments which purport to show that the doctrines of timelessness and the Incarnation are incompatible. An argument similar to the first argument I consider is briefly discussed by Stump and Kretzmann in their paper "Eternity." I argue that their treatment of this type of objection is inadequate. The second argument I present is, as far as I know, original; it depends on a certain subtlety in the doctrine of the Incarnation, *viz.*, that the Son *took on* or *assumed* a human nature. It seems that there is no way to understand what it is for the Son to take on a human nature that doesn't entail his mutability; and mutability entails temporality. Thus, since Christ is said to take on a human nature, an orthodox Christology must maintain that the Son is temporal. I conclude by considering whether the Son's temporality entails the temporality of the Godhead.

## I

The traditional Christian claim that God is timeless has come under repeated attack in the present century. Interestingly, those on the offensive are frequently orthodox believers who are concerned to defend the other traditional divine attributes. Their objections to the timelessness doctrine distill into two types. It is alleged, first, that the concept of a timeless being is incoherent and, second, that even if the concept were coherent, the God of orthodox theism, who acts in history and responds to prayer, couldn't be atemporal. Just when it appeared that the attackers would win the day, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann presented what is probably the best defense of timelessness ever offered.<sup>1</sup> And while they have neither convinced nor silenced all dissenters, they have undoubtedly caused many to reconsider this historically important doctrine. I shall here consider a problem for the timelessness proponent that has received surprisingly little attention in the literature. Generally, this objection is of the above mentioned second sort, *viz.*, an argument that the God of orthodox theism can't be timeless. However, my argument will not work with respect to just any theistic orthodoxy; rather, it depends on the central distinguishing feature of Christian orthodoxy—the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Actually, I will present two distinct arguments for the temporality of God. The first, which I shall present in the next section, is very straightforward. In section III, I offer my other, perhaps more original, argument which cru-



cially depends on a subtlety of this critical Christian doctrine. In each of these sections I will consider the response available to the timelessness advocate and argue that such replies are inadequate. Finally, in section IV, I consider the following question regarding an implication of my arguments: Does the temporality of God the Son entail the temporality of the Godhead?

## II

This first argument is perfectly straightforward. I assume that if I can show the doctrines of timelessness and the Incarnation to be fundamentally in conflict, the former will have to be surrendered.

The claim that God is timeless is the claim that God is not bound by, nor is even 'in,' time and is able to grasp all temporal instants in a single, eternal present.<sup>2</sup> It is a consequence of the timelessness doctrine that regular temporal predicates fail to apply to God. However, Christians commonly use temporal predicates when speaking of Christ. For example, the truth of the statement (to which any orthodox Christian is committed) "Christ read in the synagogue before He carried His cross" entails that such predicates do apply to Him. Yet orthodox Christianity also holds that Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity. Thus, by Leibniz's Law, the property "one's being such that temporal predicates apply to one" is true of God the Son, from which it follows that the Son is not timeless. Let's set the argument out a bit more formally:

- [A]: P1) Jesus Christ read in the synagogue (at the start of His ministry) before He carried His cross.  
 C1) So, temporal predicates apply to Jesus Christ.  
 P2) Jesus Christ = God the Son  
 C2) So, temporal predicates apply to God the Son.  
 P3) Temporal predicates don't apply to timeless beings.  
 C3) So, God the Son isn't timeless.

I am tempted to add that if the Son isn't timeless then neither are the Father or the Spirit. I say this because it is not at all clear that there could be unity in the Trinity if one of it's members were temporal and the other two timeless (or *vice versa*). I suppose that an extreme social trinitarian might be able to hold this view, but I rather doubt that anyone else could. Presently, I will consider reasons for thinking that the temporality of one member of the Trinity entails the temporality of the others. Now, however, I want to examine [A] as it stands. For regardless of whether the "temporality entailment" holds, I take it that, odd as it sounds, the timelessness advocate has not traditionally claimed that Christ was temporal. If she wishes to cling to her position in light of [A], then she shall have to deny one of [A]'s premises. We will soon examine them to see which, if any, can plausibly be denied.

Before doing this, however, let me mention a defensive move that won't work for the timelessness advocate. Very early in this essay, I noted that my

anti-timelessness arguments were, broadly speaking, of a familiar sort. This type of objection allows that the concept of a timeless being is coherent, but claims that the God of theism (or less generally, Christianity) can't be atemporal. Many of these objections allege that a timeless being would be unable to act in time; and since the God of the Bible is undoubtedly portrayed as Creator and Sustainer, they conclude that He is temporal. Stump and Kretzmann counter by arguing that once one distinguishes between the cause and effect of God's action, there is no incoherence in the claim that He is a timeless agent. It is undeniable that some of the effects of God's intentions are temporal; but it doesn't follow that the intentions which bring about such effects are themselves in time. Now it might be thought that an analogous move could be made with respect to the Incarnation. Perhaps we could distinguish between Christ's intentions and what those intentions bring about. Such a move, however, will not work. As Stump and Kretzmann point out:

The principal difficulty in the doctrine of the incarnation seems intractable to considerations of the sort with which we have been trying to alleviate difficulties associated with an eternal entity's willing to bring about a temporal event, because according to the doctrine of the Incarnation an eternal entity itself entered time.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, it seems clear that the problem with which we are now concerned presents a challenge to the timelessness proponent significantly unlike that posed by the question of an atemporal being's acting in time.

Let's carefully consider [A]. P1 seems relatively unproblematic; for even if this particular sequence of events did not happen, as long as Christ was a historical figure there will be two events in His life that stand in temporal relation to each other and that is all that is needed for P1. C1 is a logical consequence of P1, so the only way to deny it is to deny P1. P2 is a claim constitutive of orthodox Christology, which is assumed for the sake of the argument. C2 follows from C1 and P2. P3, I take it, is a conceptual truth. A part of what it is to call a being timeless is to say that temporal predicates don't apply to that being.<sup>4</sup> The third conclusion follows validly from C2 and P3. Thus, it seems as though a relatively innocent empirical claim (P1), a statement central to orthodox Christology (P2), and a conceptual truth (P3) entail the denial of the doctrine of timelessness.

What room is there for the orthodox defender of atemporality to move? If I am right about P3 being a conceptual truth, she can't abandon that. Furthermore, were the timelessness advocate to deny P2, she would no longer be orthodox. So it looks as though she only has two options: deny either that Christ read in the synagogue before He carried His cross<sup>5</sup> or that the Son is timeless. Strange as it seems, it appears that if faced with this choice, Stump and Kretzmann would hold fast and deny P1.<sup>6</sup> They write:

One of the explicitly intended consequences of the doctrine of the dual nature

[of the Incarnation] is that any statement predicating something of Christ is ambiguous unless it contains a phrase specifying one or the other or both of his two natures. That is, the proposition

(14) Christ died,

is ambiguous among these three readings:

(14a) Christ with respect to his divine nature (or qua God) died.

(14b) Christ with respect to his human nature (or qua man) died.

(14c) Christ with respect to his divine and human natures (or qua both God and man) died.

From the standpoint of orthodox Christianity (14a) and (14c) are false, and (14b) is true.<sup>7</sup>

From this passage, it is clear how Stump and Kretzmann would respond to the dilemma I've posed for the timelessness advocate. They would claim that P1 is ambiguous. In fact, since Christ is referred to twice in P1, there are eight possible renderings. But only one of the eight will be thought true by Stump and Kretzmann. Let me restate the first part of [A] in a way that respects the point of the above quotation.

- [A'] P1) Jesus Christ qua man read in the synagogue before Jesus Christ qua man carried His cross.  
 C1) So temporal predicates apply to Jesus Christ qua man.  
 P2) Jesus Christ qua God = God the Son

From C1 and P2 nothing interesting follows. You can't conclude, as I did in [A], that temporal predicates apply to God the Son since they only apply to Christ *qua man*. Therefore, it might be thought, the conclusion of [A] does not follow and the defender of timelessness has an out.

This response (call it the 'qua-move'<sup>8</sup>) merits serious consideration since it has rather broad implications. If it works, Christology has no serious problem explaining how Christ could have all the properties of divinity and all the properties of humanity, even though many of these are inconsistent (e.g., necessary *v.* contingent existence, omnipotence *v.* limited power, omniscience *v.* limited knowledge); all of the divine properties are Christ's qua God the Son, and the human properties are His qua man. Is this, however, an adequate solution? In order to know this, one must know what it means to say that one has a property *qua* or with *respect to* something.

Consider a relatively common sort of case. John Doe is an American citizen and father of an infant. One could easily enough understand the sentence "John qua American citizen has the duty to vote." Similarly, one would know full well what "John qua father has the duty to change his child's diaper" means. Roughly, these statements mean that *in virtue of* John's having a certain property (being a citizen or being a father), he has a certain duty (to

vote or to change a diaper). Thus, both of the above sentences are true. Furthermore, the following sentences are false: "John qua citizen has the duty to change his child's diaper" and "John qua father has the duty to vote." This is because it is neither in virtue of being a citizen that John has the duty to change his child's diaper nor in virtue of being a father that John has the duty to vote. Nevertheless, it is important to see that "John qua citizen has the duty to vote," entails that "John (*simpliciter*) has the duty to vote," since if it is true that John, in virtue of being a citizen, has the duty to vote, then it is true that John has the duty to vote. Now, is the sentence "John has the duty to vote" ambiguous? Certainly not. The only two ways for that sentence to be ambiguous are (i) if it is syntactically ambiguous (like, e.g., the sentence "Flying planes can be dangerous") or (ii) if at least one of the terms 'John,' 'duty,' or 'vote' is ambiguous. Clearly, there is neither syntactic ambiguity nor ambiguity in any of the sentence's terms. In any event, no ambiguity is generated simply because it is in virtue of his citizenship, and not his parental status, that John has the duty to vote.

Given what I have said about John, the important question for present purposes is, Why should we think that sentences predicating things of Christ are any different? It is true that Christ qua God is omnipotent; but why doesn't that just entail that Christ (*simpliciter*) is omnipotent? Furthermore, as long as there is neither syntactic ambiguity nor ambiguity in either the subject or the predicate, how can it possibly be that "Christ died" is ambiguous?<sup>9</sup> Perhaps there is a relevant difference between Christ and John with respect to the point at issue. The defender of timelessness might respond as follows: "Being a father and being an American citizen might mean the world to John, but no matter how he feels about them, they are not a part of his nature. John is of the same nature as you or me; he is human. He has only this one nature. In some sense, then, anything that is predicated of John is predicated of him qua human being. It is essential to Christian orthodoxy, however, that Christ is unlike us in this respect. He has a fully human nature and a fully divine nature. Hence, not everything that is true of Christ is to be predicated of Him qua a single nature. So while it might be true of a one-natured being B that any property which B has in virtue of having some other property is a property of B *simpliciter*, this is just because B has a single nature. With the dual-natured Christ, however, things are rather more complicated."

I can show that this response is mistaken with the aid of another example. Imagine a Wittgensteinian dreamland inhabited by a certain being we shall dub 'Donald Peter' or 'DP.' DP is an unusual fellow in that he has two kind-essences: one the nature of a duck and the other the nature of a rabbit.<sup>10</sup> The following sentences, then, are true: "DP with respect to his rabbit nature has long ears" and "DP with respect to his duck nature has webbed feet." Thus, it is in virtue of being a rabbit that DP has long ears and in virtue of

being a duck that he has webbed feet. And it is not in virtue of having the nature of a rabbit that DP has webbed feet; nor is it in virtue of being a duck that DP has long ears. But, *ex hypothesi*, DP is a single being, not two beings inhabiting the same body. It is DP after all, who *has* the two natures. Thus, any attribute that DP has with respect to his, say, duck nature, is nevertheless an attribute that DP has *simpliciter*. And the same goes with respect to his rabbit nature. Therefore, the sentence "DP has long ears" is true and unambiguous. We are not here trying to refer to *a nature* of DP's; we are picking out *DP* and since there is only one of him there is no ambiguity.

The same thing is true of Christ. His having two natures does not entail an ambiguity of predication. In stressing the dual nature of Christ, Stump and Kretzmann have failed to pay significant attention to the other crucial aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation, *viz.*, that the two natures are joined (while remaining distinct) in one Person. Christ has a divine nature and a human nature; but He is a *single* dual-natured person. So even if it is in virtue of His being human that temporal predicates apply to Him, and it is only in virtue of His being divine that Christ is identical to God the Son, it still follows that Christ is the Son to Whom temporal predicates apply. Therefore, I don't think that this strategy adopted by Stump and Kretzmann takes the punch out of [A].<sup>11</sup>

In his book *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Thomas V. Morris puts a bit differently the point that I have been at pains to make. Although the following quotation amounts to little more than an assertion, it looks obviously true (this should not be taken to imply that Morris's entire discussion is mere assertion; for it is not). Although Morris is not addressing the compatibility of the Incarnation and timelessness, he is concerned with the general form of the defense of that compatibility that interests us here (*viz.*, the qua-move). Writes Morris,

Consider any conjunctive reduplicative proposition of the form *x as A is N and x as B is not N*. If the subjects of both conjuncts are the same and the substituends of *N* are univocal across the conjunction, then as long as (1) the reduplication predicates being *A* of *x* and predicates being *B* of *x*, and (2) being *N* is entailed by being *A*, and not being *N* is entailed by being *B*, then the reduplicative form of predication accomplishes nothing except for muddying the waters, since in the end the contradiction stands of *x* being characterized as both *N* and not *N*.<sup>12</sup>

If we substitute 'Christ' for '*x*,' 'man' for '*A*,' 'God' for '*B*,' and 'temporal' for '*N*,' the conditions mentioned by Morris are met. Again, it would seem that those who use such a maneuver in an attempt to avoid problems with the doctrine of the Incarnation overemphasize the dual nature of Christ and fail to pay enough attention to the unity of His being.

Before moving to the second argument, I want to briefly consider an ob-

jection raised by a referee of this journal. The doctrine of timelessness is often regarded, even by its adherents, as negotiable. That is, if there are substantial philosophical objections to it that cannot be adequately countered, one may simply abandon it. However, if it could be shown that the same type of considerations that I raise against timelessness also cause problems for the more central doctrine of divine spacelessness, then the believer has been given no sufficient reason to give ground; for, surely, these arguments won't convince her that God is spatial. Consider then the following argument which is structurally similar to [A]:

- [A"]: P1) Jesus Christ is in Nazareth and not in Jerusalem.  
 C1) So, local predicates apply to Jesus Christ.  
 P2) Jesus Christ = God the Son.  
 C2) So, local predicates apply to God the Son.  
 P3) Local predicates don't apply to spaceless beings.  
 C3) So, God the Son isn't spaceless.<sup>13</sup>

(A couple of clarifying comments. First, to keep the tenses manageable, one is to imagine that this argument was constructed at an appropriate moment in Christ's earthly life. Second, a local predicate is one that applies to an object in virtue of its occupying space.) The questions before the court are, if one accepts [A] is one thereby committed to [A"]? And isn't it much worse to surrender aspatiality than atemporality? The answers to these questions are "Yes" and "No." That is, I can't see any way for a sensible person to be persuaded by [A] and unimpressed with [A"]. Since I think that any orthodox believer presented with [A] ought to accept it, I am committed to saying that same about [A"]. But I don't think that this is as bad as it first appears. This is because of an important asymmetry between spacelessness and timelessness. For the moment, let's suppose that God the Son was atemporal before becoming incarnate and entering time. (This might strike some as incoherent; but I propose to assume that it's not.) The relevant issue now is whether a being can go from being atemporal to temporal to atemporal again. It seems clear that this can't be done. For one thing (to foreshadow section III) a being that undergoes intrinsic change is mutable and so not atemporal. Also, a being that exists at a particular time will always be such that it existed at a time and so temporal predicates will always apply to it. Thus, if Christ was ever temporal, temporal He remains.

Spacelessness does not share this rigidity. As far as I can tell, there is nothing even apparently incoherent in the idea of an aspatial being's becoming spatial and then returning to spacelessness. Also, while there is a very tight relationship between change and temporality (again, see section III), no such connection exists for mutability and spatiality. Thus, the Christian can hold that while God the Son was on the earth, He was indeed spatial, but that



this condition lasted for only thirty-three years. The parallel claim regarding His temporality cannot be held.

To sum up: I conclude that the Stump/Kretzmann response to [A] fails. Further, I can see no other reason for thinking that P1 is false. And since P2 is necessary for Christological orthodoxy, the believer ought not to surrender it. Finally, P3 is a conceptual truth and so can't be denied by anyone who understands it. Thus, I think we have here a compelling argument for the claim that the Second Person of the Trinity is temporal. And the worry that acceptance of [A] has untoward theological consequences, e.g., entailing the rejection of spacelessness, is misplaced. One will have to claim that God the Son was spatial, but only during His earthly ministry; and that is just what one would expect.

### III

Since most of us can rarely be sure that we have not overlooked an objection to an argument which we have put forth, it is worthwhile to offer a second for the same conclusion; and that is precisely what I shall do in this section. The argument here will depend on a rather subtle aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Though subtle, this aspect is found in almost all classical formulations of the Christian claim concerning the nature of Christ.

Let me begin by quoting from the letter of Paul and Timothy to the Church at Philippi.

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>14</sup>

This passage seems to be the most explicit scriptural basis for the orthodox two-natures view of Christ. He is said to be "fully God and fully man"; that is, He has a human and a divine nature. Yet He is but one hypostasis, one person. This is the heart and soul of the doctrine of the Incarnation. But a look at the above passage reveals there is a bit more to it; for it is claimed that Christ "takes" the form of a servant and is made in human likeness. This subtlety has not been overlooked by theologians.<sup>15</sup> Thus, any deeply orthodox account of the Incarnation of Christ will include the idea of the Word becoming, or taking on, flesh. The idea is that while the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, is co-eternal with the Father and Spirit, He is co-eternal only in his divine nature. The human nature is something Christ adopted for His earthly mission.<sup>16</sup> Now as Morris points out in his aforementioned book on the Incarnation,<sup>17</sup> the human nature must be accidental to Christ, i.e., not a part of his individual essence. For if it were essential to Christ, then taking it on would have brought about the nonexistence of the the original Second

Person of the Trinity (since nothing can undergo a change in its essential properties without thereby ceasing to exist). So the claim must be understood as Christ's having two natures, only one of which (*viz.*, the divine nature) is essential to his identity.

Perhaps the only plausible way of understanding the 'taking on' aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation is as the claim that the assumption of human nature involves a change in the intrinsic, though non-essential, attributes of God the Son. Thus, in a relatively straightforward way, God the Son is mutable. But if He is mutable, then He is temporal, since timelessness entails strict immutability.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, God the Son is temporal.

Put more formally, the argument looks like this:

- [B]: P1) God the Son eternally (and essentially) has His Divine nature.
- P2) The human (accidental) nature of God the Son is assumed (or 'taken on').
- P3) X's assuming (or 'taking on') a nature involves a change in X's intrinsic properties.
- C1) So, the assumption of the human nature brings about a change in the intrinsic (though non-essential) properties of God the Son.
- C2) So, the Son is mutable.
- P4) Mutability entails temporal duration.
- C3) So the Son is not timeless.

What is wrong with [B]? I doubt that anything is, but I think that if it is unsound it is because either P2 or P3 is false. Let's consider these, perhaps dubious, premises. Clearly, one way of rejecting [B] is to deny that Christ 'assumed' His human nature; that is, someone might maintain that a human nature was not 'taken on' by Christ since He has it eternally. If this second nature is not assumed and is co-eternal with Christ's divine nature, then P2 is false and the argument is unsound. It might be that the two prime defenders of the timelessness doctrine would escape the conclusion of [B] in just this way. For when considering an argument much in the spirit of [A], Stump and Kretzmann make the following claim, which, for our purposes, is appropriate in the discussion of [B].

The divine nature of the second person of the Trinity, like the divine nature of either of the other persons of the Trinity, cannot become temporal; *nor could the second person at some time acquire a human nature He does not eternally have.*<sup>19</sup>

I think that this statement can be understood in two ways. It might simply be the denial of the claim that the Second Person of the Trinity *assumed* or *took on* a human nature; i.e., they might be claiming that the Son has His human nature eternally. It would appear that this is the most straightforward interpretation. However, it could be that Stump and Kretzmann do not intend anything this unorthodox; they might only be claiming that Christ could not

have acquired a human nature *at some time*. Obviously, they mean to assert this much. But it might be that Christ's acquiring or taking on or assuming a human nature does not entail His doing it *at some time*. If this is how we are to understand Stump and Kretzmann, then they are denying P3. For if Christ acquires human nature, but does so timelessly, then we have an instance of one's taking on a nature without a change in one's intrinsic properties. Now if they intend this passage in the former way, they've avoided [B]'s intended sting. Timelessness will be spared, but not without cost; for they will have denied a part of the traditional Christian claim about the Incarnation. In the next section of this essay, I shall have more to say about this; for now, I propose to have a look at the second interpretation.

Again, if Stump and Kretzmann are to be read in the second suggested way, they are rejecting the third premise. But how can they deny that one's taking on a nature entails that one has changed? In particular, how can they deny that Christ's assuming a human nature entails that His human nature is not co-eternal with, among other things, His divine nature? I suppose that there is one way of thinking about natures whereby this inference is invalid; natures can be thought of as universals. There is surely a sense of 'human nature' according to which there is just one and all of us who are humans are rightly said to 'share' it. If we think of 'human nature' as a universal, then Christ's human nature surely was pre-existent and, if Platonism is true, eternal as well. However, we may also use 'human nature' to refer to a particular instantiation of the universal human nature. It seems that when, for example, Aquinas writes in this context of Christ's human nature, he is thinking of Christ's particular human nature.<sup>20</sup> Christ, like the rest of us, takes part in the universal human nature, but, like the rest of us again, his taking part in the universal consists in his having a particular human nature; so Stump and Kretzmann can't deny P3 by claiming that the nature that Christ took on is an eternal Platonic form unless they equivocate on the word 'nature.'

Given this understanding of natures, there is still an objection to the third premise. One might claim that there is a way of construing what it is for Christ to assume or take on a human nature that does not entail mutability. If this were the case, then although His human nature was taken on (or acquired), it could still be that it was had by Him eternally. Is there any such reading of what it is to 'take on' or 'assume' a nature (or anything else, for that matter) that is compatible with immutability? Typically, when one 'takes on' something (such as a new attitude or job), one brings it about that one has something which one previously lacked. That is to say, in run-of-the-mill cases, if a person 'takes on' X, she changes in at least one of her intrinsic properties. The question presently before us is whether one's taking on X entails 'that in virtue of assuming X, one has changed. It certainly sounds to my ear as if the entailment holds. I can't see how, if the Second Person of

the Trinity is perfectly immutable (and atemporal), He could 'take on' anything. What He has, He has; what He has not, He has not.

It seems to me, however, that [B] presents the orthodox Christian with a less clear choice than that presented by [A]. For if [A] could be shown to be a valid argument, then the Christian, if such she is to remain, must disavow the timelessness of God the Son. However, the problem posed by [B] is less severe and so the choice is less obvious. The alternatives here are the claims that Christ took on or assumed or acquired a human nature and that He is atemporal. One does not cease to be a Christian (and perhaps does not even cease to be an orthodox Christian) no matter which one chooses.

#### IV

In this section I shall examine an issue that has previously surfaced, but with which I have yet to deal properly. I have argued that the Incarnation of Christ entails that the Second Person of the Trinity is temporal. If I am right, what implications are there for the relationship of the Godhead to time; i.e., does the temporality of Christ entail the temporality of the Trinity?

After stating [A], I claimed that I was tempted to draw the further conclusion that God (*simpliciter*)<sup>21</sup> is temporal. The idea is that the unity of the Godhead requires its members to have the same relation to time. Thus, if it can be shown that one Person of the Trinity is temporal, it will follow that the Godhead is temporal as well. There are two ways such an argument could go. First, one might show that the Son's temporality entails the Father's temporality and that one (or both) of these entails that the Spirit is not timeless. If it were shown that each member of the Trinity is in time, then it would follow that God is too. This would, I think, be the preferred avenue. Yet there is another way of concluding the Godhead's temporality from Christ's. It might be that one member of the Trinity's being temporal would entail the Godhead's temporality. If one were to go this route, one would not need to demonstrate individually that each member of the Trinity is temporal. In fact, it would not be clear that showing that God is temporal in this way would entail anything about the Father's and Spirit's relationship to time. I propose to look at both of these options to see if either can provide us with a reason to think that God is temporal.

One might suppose that the Son's temporality entails that the Father and Spirit are temporal because one's relation to time is a deep feature of one's nature. In the Stump and Kretzmann paper, temporality and atemporality are referred to as "modes of existence."<sup>22</sup> Now according to orthodox Christian theology, the Father, Son, and Spirit are, in some sense, a unity. This unity must at least consist in their sharing a divine nature in the same way that creatures share natural-kind essences. It is plausible to think that either the

property of being temporal or the property of being atemporal is kind-essential for every kind. Consider, then, this principle.

[P]:  $\Box(Kx \rightarrow Tx) \vee \Box(Kx \rightarrow \sim Tx)$

[P] says that for any kind K, either it is a necessary truth that every member of K is temporal or it is a necessary truth that every member is not temporal. But if Christ is temporal while the Father and Spirit are atemporal, then [P] is violated (on the assumption that divinity is a kind-essence). I must admit that [P] is not obviously true and, unfortunately, I can't seem to find a good argument for it. However, it strikes me as true and might so strike others. And the fact that there doesn't seem to be a good argument for it shouldn't, in and of itself, count very much against it since there aren't good arguments for lots of other well-respected metaphysical principles (e.g., Ockham's Razor and Leibniz's Law).

As stated above, even if [P] is false there might still be a way of getting from "God the Son is temporal" to "God is temporal." For the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, like the Trinity itself, is indeed mysterious. According to it, there are three Persons, yet only one God; the three individual Persons share one nature.<sup>23</sup> Thus, there is an important sense in which the three are one. It is not implausible, then, to think that any of the non-relational, accidental properties that one member of the Trinity has is had by the Godhead. Thus, since the Spirit is a comforter, God is a comforter; since Christ died for our sins, the Deity died for our sins. And, perhaps, since Christ is temporal, God is temporal. More formally, consider this argument:

- [C]: P1) Temporal predicates apply to God the Son.  
 P2) If temporal predicates apply to one member of the Trinity (which do not apply in virtue of His individual essence), then they apply to God.  
 C1) Temporal predicates apply to God.  
 P3) Temporal predicates don't apply to timeless beings.  
 C2) God is not timeless.

Inasmuch as one emphasizes the unity of the Godhead, one has reason to accept [C]. For if the three are parts of a single thing, then it would seem that if one part of the Trinity were temporal, God would not be timeless.

If [A] is sound, then the only premise in [C] that is arguable is P2. And one might suspect that there is no way to support this premise without committing the fallacy of composition. That is, not all inferences of the form

- P1) X has property p  
 P2) X is a part of object Y  
 C) Therefore, Y has property p

are valid. For example, a brick has the property of fitting in a breadbasket, but it certainly doesn't follow that the house of which the brick is a part has

that property. It might be argued that the temporality of God is not entailed by the temporality of Christ, since Christ is but a part of God.

Since [C] does appear to be an instance of the fallacy of composition, I think that this objection is worth considering; I also believe, however, that it ultimately can be avoided. What the fallacy of composition shows us is that not every property possessed by a part is possessed by the whole. But this doesn't mean that there are no properties that are such that if they are had by a part then they are had by its whole. And clearly, this latter claim is false. Suppose that an adobe-home builder makes bricks partly from mud and grass. Any home constructed out of such bricks will have the property of being made partly from mud and grass; and of course this is because its parts will have, individually, this property. So there would appear to be some properties which, if had by a part, are had by the whole. Now it seems clear that being temporal is just such a property. Therefore, I take it that if the Son is temporal, so is the Trinity. In light of [A] and/or [B], we know of one Person of the Trinity that He is temporal. And given the apparent soundness of [C] and the controversial nature of the doctrine of timelessness, I think that the most reasonable thing to conclude is that the Godhead is in time.

## V

In this paper, I have presented two arguments for the claim that the Second Person of the Trinity is temporal. The soundness of these arguments strikes me as obvious; i.e., the fact that Christians are committed to the identity of the Second Person of the Trinity and Jesus Christ would seem to clearly entail the Son's temporality. However, there have been those who have denied it. I have argued that the favored defensive maneuver of these philosophers is mistaken, that nothing is gained by predicating temporal properties of Christ qua man. I therefore conclude that if one is committed to an orthodox Christology, one shall have to reject (at least with respect to the Second Person of the Trinity) the doctrine of timelessness. Furthermore, such a conclusion can be defended even if the qua-move worked, since [B] would still go through. After all, it can't be Christ qua man who took on a human nature since Christ didn't exist qua man before He had a human nature. It must have been Christ qua God who became man. Therefore, the Second Person of the Trinity is mutable and not timeless.

I have also considered whether the temporality of Christ entails the temporality of God. Although I can't claim to have conclusively demonstrated anything here, I do think that Christ's temporality makes it more reasonable to think that God is temporal than that He is not.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. This defense is the essay "Eternity," by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 8, August 1981, pages 429-58.

2. Not surprisingly, the best explanation (as well as defense) of the doctrine of timelessness is found in Stump and Kretzmann, *op.cit.*

3. Stump and Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, page 451.

4. Stump and Kretzmann make important use of a notion that they call "Eternal-Temporal Simultaneity." It might be claimed that this is a sort of temporal predicate since it has a temporal component. Thus, even timeless beings have some temporal predicates that apply to them. This maneuver could be easily avoided, however, by speaking of 'strictly' temporal predicates, i.e., predicates that include only temporal elements. Strictly temporal predicates would then apply to Christ but not to timeless beings and the argument would go through.

Similarly, it could be claimed that what we might call 'negative temporal predicates' apply to God. For example, the sentence "God is such that there is no time at which He exists" expresses a truth if He is timeless. Yet "being such that there is not time at which one exists" might be construed as a temporal predicate, albeit a negative one. While I don't have an analysis of the notion of a negative predicate, I think that we have a sufficient intuitive grasp of it for our purposes. So my claim that no temporal predicates apply to timeless beings would be more perspicuously (and laboriously) put as the claim that no positive, strictly temporal predicates apply to timeless beings.

5. Of course, as previously stated, in order to defeat this general type of argument the timelessness advocate would have to deny more than this particular succession of acts; she would have to deny all such successions. Henceforth, when I speak of the defender of atemporality's denying P1, it should be understood as an elliptical way of saying that she shall have to deny that there are any actions A and B such that Christ did A before He did B.

6. Apparently, Stump and Kretzmann aren't alone in this. In his book *The Divine Trinity* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.), pages 254-56, David Brown suggests this same move we are about to see Stump and Kretzmann make.

7. Stump and Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, page 452.

8. I want to make it very clear what I mean by the 'qua-move.' I mean the defensive maneuver according to which two inconsistent properties can be had by Christ as long as they are not predicated via the same nature. Thus, the simple recognition (as one finds in the Chalcedonian definition) that Christ is "of the same reality as God as far as His deity is concerned and of the same reality as we are ourselves as far as His human-ness is concerned" is *not* to be considered an example of the qua-move. For the claim here is simply that Christ shares in both divine and in human reality because of his having both natures.

9. Stump and Kretzmann, if they are to maintain their orthodoxy, must claim that the subject of this sentence isn't ambiguous; to claim ambiguity is, apparently, to side with Nestorius against Cyril of Alexandria and Chalcedonian orthodoxy. See the quotation from Jaroslav Pelikan in footnote 12.

10. Whether the natures of a duck and a rabbit are possibly co-exemplified I don't know. But I don't think that it really matters for my concern here. The Christologically orthodox must maintain that one can't rule out, in principle, the co-exemplification of natures in a single being; if it can happen with natures as radically different as God and humanity it would seem possible that it could happen with the more similar natures of a duck and a rabbit.

11. Furthermore, Stump's and Kretzmann's claim that the qua-move is an "explicitly intended consequence" of the two natures view is at best controversial. Although not considering specifically Stump's and Kretzmann's article, Thomas V. Morris, in *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), writes "[I do not] think that the two-natures model was concocted in order to be able to employ such a strategy [i.e., the qua-move]" [page 38]. Indeed, the qua-move appears, in spirit, to be closer to the Nestorian heresy than to orthodoxy. Writing about the conflict between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, and the former's eventual vindication at Chalcedon, Jaroslav Pelikan claims that "...the theology of the hypostatic union had certainly been vindicated when its designation of 'one and the same Christ' as the subject of all Christological predicates, including deity and crucifixion, had been acknowledged as identical with the creed of Nicea," *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), page 262. Now, strictly speaking, this is not inconsistent with what Stump and Kretzmann say about the intent behind the doctrine. But given the stress put on the unity of the Person of Christ, it seems unlikely that such predicates would have been thought, by e.g., Cyril, to be ambiguous.

12. *Ibid.*, pages 48-49.

13. Originally, this argument was formulated as an objection to omnipresence rather than spacelessness. But it seems to me that what is really at issue in the argument is the doctrine of spacelessness and not omnipresence. In the original formulation, (P3) reads "Local predicates don't apply to omnipresent beings." On this reading, (P3) might be true, but it isn't obviously so (see Morris (*op. cit.*, page 91) for an account of omnipresence that does not entail that every omnipresent being is spaceless). However, if one formulates (P3) as I have, then it is clearly right.

14. Philippians 2:5-7, Revised Standard Version.

15. Besides the above-quoted passage from Philippians, John 1:14 provides biblical foundation for this 'taking on' aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This aspect of the doctrine can be found in: the Chalcedonian definition which stresses that Christ had his divine nature "before time began" but had become man only in "these last days"; the Nicene creed which states that Christ "for the sake of us men and for the purpose of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man..."; the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in which St. Thomas entitles the forty-third chapter of Book Four "That the Human Nature Assumed by the Word did not Pre-Exist its Assumption but was Assumed in the Conception Itself"; in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book II, Chapter XIV) in which Calvin claims that Christ "is believed to be the Son of God because the Word begotten of the Father before all ages took human nature in a hypostatic union"; and in the Heidelberg Confession (Q 35), the Second Helvetic Confession (Chapter XI), and the Catechism of the Episcopal Church



(found in the Book of Common Prayer). I do not pretend that this list is exhaustive; it merely indicates how pervasive the 'taking on' aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation is in the catholic church.

16. While the human nature was adopted for earthly duty, Christ is said to have retained it.

17. Morris, *op. cit.*, page 41.

18. In this paper I intend to use the word 'immutability' in a very strong sense. On this view, God is immutable if and only if he undergoes no change in any of his nonrelational properties. I choose this understanding of immutability since it is the only one that is consistent with timelessness; if God is immutable only in some weaker sense, then He is temporal.

19. Stump and Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, page 453, emphasis added.

20. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. IV, chp., 43-44.

21. I use the locution 'God (*simpliciter*)' and, henceforth 'God,' to designate the Trinity (or what is sometimes called 'the Godhead') and not any particular member of it. So the Father, Son, and Spirit make up what 'God,' as I'm using the term, designates.

22. *Ibid.*, page 445.

23. As Aquinas points out in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (bk. IV, chp. 39, sec. 3), this claim is something of an inverse of the Incarnation; Christ has two natures, yet is one Person while the Godhead consists of three Persons yet with a single nature.

24. This paper has been greatly improved by the many helpful comments of William P. Alston. I'm also indebted to James E. Taylor, Susan P. Wilder and an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy*.