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The Lord [Eternal] is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

--Psalm 23

I am the first and the last, the living One.

I was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore.

--Apocalypse 1:18

Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh.

"For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardships and all my father's house."

--Genesis 41:51

If there really is a text that *seems* "timeless," that acquires kind of a timeless patina, it is the passage from *Confessions* where, tackling the most banal of conversation topics—time, what is it?—Saint Augustine lets go of the handrail and indulges a remark as simple as it is sublime: "I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled".¹ Given time, nothing frustrates knowledge as does knowledge, or memory as does memory. And while, for Augustine, knowledge is bound up with memory, and memory with knowledge, and both seem to hang on time, time, littering or scattered about on their interface, is less a negation of knowledge than a de-negation of memory. One thing is to remember or to know. Another is to have faith. And what is time if one does not have it, and what does one have unless one has it on faith? Is not time's use to wear faith, especially if faith itself does not consist of drawing, so to speak, God out of forgetfulness, but of *timing* God? And timing God is more than simply reminiscing God, just as knowledge is more than a vestige of time, just as memory is no shorting of time but a desire for time and its fullness, its timeliness rather than its timelessness.

8. Any more than knowledge, memory is not timeless. Or else it would go blind. And not only blind but also oblivious of the fact that it expresses as much as it represses or that it impresses as much as it oppresses, and lingers on only because, whether they be oppressed or repressed, all leftovers alike have in the process been marginalised by history and denied their right to appear in the calendar of time. And even belying time, history always is the strong man's story: it repeats itself—as subsequently genocide will remind us.
9. No genocide is or will ever be a unique phenomenon: it can be forgotten if only because, however massive it may be, it can never be exonerated from the death of a single person. Or it can, for the same reason, be remembered, but then only by those who will not forget—and cannot forgive either. They have been routinized by history. They remember a genocide by forgetting its lesson and, in this respect, do scarcely better than does history which repeats itself. And which, by repeating what it will not forget, forgets what it pretends to remember, namely that memory itself had better be forgotten unless it can forgive. Memory does not pertain to history, but to time.

¹Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, XI,14 (translated by H.R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, Baltimore 1961).

10. Time does not repeat itself. It can only be given—or forgiven. No wonder, time is the time of God's patience, of his passion for man—in whom he "forgets" himself as does a mother in her child. Just as God is a passion for man, so is also time a passion. A passion for time. Repeated, time and again. Or, for that matter, "redeemed"². Or else neither knowledge nor morality would have a past; nor would memory itself only function in the present. And for a time. In such a manner that, caught between a past already gone and a future that is not yet, time is only present once and for all. It lasts, but only as would a bridge spanning a river without banks. It lasts, but only as does that which cannot be measured, such as a masterpiece which, though dated, is never outdated. It bodies forth, even as the word becomes flesh when the time comes. Time is *appointment*, though not in the manner of this or that which happened once upon a time, but of that which happens once and for all. And for that same reason it is also *dis-appointment*. Or else it would be reduced to what is no longer, or to what is not yet. It would be reduced to chronology. To arithmosophy. Even to meteorology. And it would even be eclipsed by as many figures of time as it is disfigured by, were it not for that property of time to reconfigure itself, to be redeemed and pass yet without passing itself by: the only thing that outlives time is outlived time—a contradiction if not the very dis-appointment of time by itself.
11. Still, what is time? In French the same word, *temps*, designates both time and the weather, while in English time designates at one and the same time the time, the hour and the number. Somehow, time can be and is all that. But regardless of how significant is the fact that time is accordingly summoned through the screen of another logic, of another grammar of time than that of the past, the present, the future and their respective satellites, time itself is a grab bag word. A word for which nothing is that is off-limits. A word which countenances nothing it does not de-limit. And even is itself delimited by what it countenances. It outwits all grammar as does an exception which confirms the rule, or as do past, present and future when they clear a way for time and at the same time numb its very timing. The problem is that the grammar of time is not reducible to words, much less to those that *tell* time. Time is not a matter of telling, but of timing. Telling is linear; timing is binary³.
12. Take for example the chronicles of the kings of Israel. As behooves kings, they succeed one upon the other, the good upon the less good, like the lean cows upon the fat cows. But does that justify the looking at time only under the form of a succession? Instead of a linear sequence, eventually zigzagging to the point of caricature, must we not view it as unfolding another grammar of time?
13. And too bad if this displeases conventional ideas, biblical time is at one and the same time binary and alternative rather than linear and successive. Pointing to an "either/or", it is "accomplished" or "unaccomplished;" past, on the one hand and, on the other hand, future; perfect on one hand and accordingly... imperfect on the other. In keeping with the biblical ear, only that lasts which can and must change, and changes. And only that changes which has no past. Time which passes has no past. Just as, when the creation happens, nothing happens that had already happened before. Or ever will, in the new creation, after God has made everything from new⁴ and, the apparent dialectic of identity and difference notwithstanding,

²Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 4:5.

³The binary implies a choice, dualism an opposition. They should not be confused.

⁴From the Old Testament to the New Testament the Bible is haunted by the idea of time. And not only in the wake of Ecclesiastes, whose influence, in a supreme irony, still remains to be determined. The Bible itself keeps from objectifying time...and from slicing it up. By contrast with the word (*verbum*), in order for the written word (*scriptum*) to last, it must

the quest for sameness and the alienation it postulates gives way to the primacy of otherness of which solidarity is the avant-garde, the premise, the prolepsis.

14. Unlike space which is seen, time is heard. Space establishes distance, as between sacred and profane or past and future. Subverting all distance that makes of the other an alien, time can only be heard and is heard through none other than the present tense, a tense to which one has access as to an electronic site, and whose inscription I bear to the extent that, torn from myself as from nothingness, I cohere with myself and instead of escheating into myself, become responsible for myself if only because of my solidarity with others. A hermeneutic principle, it is at work with regard to the things as well as the beings which God brings forth out of nothing. Proleptic, it implies a beginning, but knows of none that could be timeless. Time does not exist, it becomes: a beginning without beginning, it commences. Leaving us behind, it delivers us up to being. Or, prompting us ahead, it delivers us from the obsession of it, insofar as even God, rather than a supreme and absolute Being, is but a word. But then he is that word which alone can and does liberate. And gives us the opportunity to be transformed, to change and, from being a datum, to become a mandate. Ever and again God speaks, and the thing happens once and for all: the cacophony gives way before the creation; there is a time for the heavens and a time for the earth; there is a time for everything. From now on there is above all and whatever the regime a time for the human and a time for God, more especially since God is not merely any God of time.
15. No doubt, Saint Augustine is fascinated by all that: he invents autobiography, and immediately time, rather than matter, looms up on the horizon of being as principle of individuation, the tracing of which he outlines by writing, not dialogues à la Plato, but soliloquies. (I do not say monologues). Speaking with himself as though he spoke to an other, Augustine realises he cannot do so unless he takes or gives himself time, and he cannot have time unless that other—God or himself—is not demeaned into the status of a hostage or a ventriloquist. Man or woman, no human is ever as near to God as when one is human, fully—all too human, and for the simple reason that God is then not only different from all that is but can only defer to that which is human—to that than which God is radically other. And God is therefore totally other even though we experience him, and have the experience of not only his absence, but also, and above all, of his presence. At Bethel, only a heap of stones marks Jacob's encounter with God.⁵ The God who speaks to us is not a God who is now present, now absent, but a God who reveals himself: he is radically other, much as eternity is in comparison with time, or man or woman in comparison with their own selves since they have access to themselves only through other people.⁶
16. We do not keep time, but its memory, at best harking them back to one another. And turning from time to memory, we tell time and each time we do so we actually turn time into memory. Into a story. A story told again and again from one generation to the next, regardless of how much of a make-believe the recasting of roles turns out to be: the die is already cast. Memory is self-serving. It had then better be forgotten. But if, instead, it is viewed as a further opportunity for a scenario,⁷ then nothing is played in advance. Turning the story of the exodus

itself be ephemeral. Or else there would not be two testaments constrained, maintained, by one and the same word of God.

⁵Genesis 35: 9-15.

⁶As is known, the formula harks back to Saint Augustine, and recently to Kierkegaard and Ricoeur.

⁷Between narrative or story and scenario the difference is of the same order as that between an intangible deposit of the faith and the idea of an *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* or, for that matter, between Deuteronomy 26:5sq. and

from Egypt into a scenario, Genesis universalises the story of the children of Israel. And because the same happens with the incarnation, I call scenario that which, for the time being and regardless of whatever role we should play in this world, confronts us with a brand new mandate. An obligation—towards oneself as well as other people. Towards the Other. Should time even result in a zero sum operation, it would be a mandate⁸.

17. Not only money— even though through the very terms of this encounter with the other in the stream of time is woven a demand of which I am at once creditor and debtor. Creditor, and yet (*et tamen*) debtor; debtor *et tamen* creditor.⁹ By contrast with the ineluctable, historicistic dualism of “already/not yet”, the dialectic prompted by an *et tamen* approach is binary: mounting a genuine challenge to freedom, it stems from that radically *eschatic*¹⁰ option thanks to which the biblical tradition resists the lure of dualism, and is equally kept from sinking into the no less false if fascinating alternative of monism. The fact is that between those two tenses known to Hebrew, the “accomplished” and the “unaccomplished,” the line of demarcation does not lie in this or that instant so much as it continually lasts even while the present shows up time and again at the right time for its appointment, for its rendez-vous, with destiny, and assumes it—or for that matter is weaned from it. And since destiny and time alike suffer neither addition nor subtraction, all suspicion of pointillism or of hypostatised sameness is by the same token disavowed. The present is neither that serpent which bites its own tail (cyclical time blending with nature) nor that arrow of time so linear as to withdraw in the genealogy of a trace—if not simply of a race, be it tribal, national or cultural—or again so linear as to retract at least into a story. So timeless a story, however, that it would last forever, as though it had the last word. A word which however it is not able to own, unless it should stumble upon the apocalypse (hebraism), much in the same way that, in search of the last word, of the ultimate revelation, one starts from nature and arrives at gnosticism (hellenism). Apocalypse and gnosticism, those twin temptations have not ceased to torment Christianity, even if, in the main, the latter has known how to keep clear of them. Time which comes to an end (apocalypse)¹¹ is time deprived of finality. It is chronology, not destiny. On the other hand, time which suspends its flight is frozen time (gnosticism); and hence knowledge is to belief as the image, able no longer even to tell a tale, is to the word—in short, is as being is to language, or as the ticket carrying the price is to that which nevertheless is priceless. Only language and language alone liberates us from that which we are by ourselves; it liberates us from what we have in common with the other creatures and yet results in the fact that by contrast we relate to God and with God are brought back to language. To this power of language, thanks to which no fusion is possible between ourselves and the other, and no more between God and the human, whether man or woman. Time is otherness. It is a metaphor of language. But, unlike nature or history which trail time as would a trace or a story, language is its intrigue, the plot of its scenario. Sublating rather than merely relating temporality, language turns

Deuteronomy 24:16 or Jeremiah 31:29-30.

⁸Time neither dies for us nor redeems us; we must on the contrary redeem time (Ephesians 5:26, Colossians 4:5).

⁹Would the alternative of sin and grace have meaning if the believer were not at the same time sinful and justified (Luther)? At best, the dialectic of “already/not yet” is only a linear bastardisation of the eschatic dialectic of the “*et tamen*” which can also be rendered by “in spite of” to the extent that, before God, man is at one and the same time sinful and justified—simultaneously.

¹⁰Eschatic, from the Greek *eschaton* : ultimate, last, recent, near or intimate, new—none of which excludes the historical notions of separation (from the past) and of sharing (broken body or bread) and of solidarity (cf. Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia*, A Crossroad Book/The Seabury Press, New York 1977).

¹¹In the sense of catastrophe and cataclysm accompanying the end of the world and not in the sense of the Revelation of St. John.

time, not into memory, but into words; it is the Verb of time: time begins with the word, and the word that was in the beginning is the word that times with the creation as it will with the incarnation. To the psalmist who declares “The Everlasting One is my shepherd” echoes the Christ who says “I am the good shepherd”.¹²

18. They said of St. Augustine that he invented the philosophy of history. And they hastened to dull the very heart of his thought: the incarnation. In spite of Greek mythology and its plethora of personified gods, Augustine (who has himself shown an eager taste for all the available beliefs and chiefly wandered from manichaeism to neoplatonism) realises that myth does in fact provide you with everything you could desire, except for incarnation—namely: the idea that time is not only succession, nor even solid and coherent continuity, even persuasive, but is also a rupture, discontinuity; or that although time moves now with small steps now by big leaps forward, it has no beginning and no end; and that time is probed only by that which, no longer being what it was, is at the same time that which it is not—that it can only be probed by that which is eternal. With Augustine, from cosmology or genealogy (physical time), time is switched on language, through which, on the one hand, it sounds like chronology (historical) and, on the other, like eschatology. “For we know, O Lord,” he writes, “that the extent to which something once was, but no longer is, is the the measure of its death; and the extent to which something once was not, but now is, is the measure of its beginning. Your Word, then, in no degree gives place to anything or takes the place of anything, because it is truly immortal and eternal. Therefore it is by a Word co-eternal with yourself that you say all that you say; you say all at one and the same time, yet you say all eternally; and it is by this Word that all things are made which you say are to be made. You create them by your Word alone and in no other way. Yet the things which you create by your Word do not all come into being at one and the same time, nor are they eternal.”¹³
19. Augustine does not content himself with psychologising time and telling its inner story. For him time is not a mere narrative. It is above all relation. Nor does he satisfy himself with historicising time: he secularises it—and thus refers us to the *saeculum* with all the connotations evinced by this term: temporal (*siècle*)¹⁴ as well as spatial (world), as in “world without end.” Developing all this, Augustine however does it by articulating the dialectic of the city of God and the earthly city in such a way that—as they must—fullness of time and incarnation hang on one another.
20. Put differently: this introvert that was St. Augustine is also someone who thinks in terms of the church. And who cannot fully discuss the incarnation without appointing it to the secularisation of time, whether by desacralising nature (“natural man” is reprovved simply because no one could be natural except by grace) and, for the same reasons, by defatalising history. More than a philosophy of history, what Augustine stresses is a theology of time, of the Seventh Day—when the day is “without evening and without sunset, because you have sanctified it, in order that it should last forever. And the repose you take after the wonderful work of your rest we may understand, by the word of your holy scripture, that we also, after the completion of our work, which your grace makes good, we ourselves shall rest in the sabbath of eternal life.”¹⁵ Less the summit than the sum of creation, the sabbath is the sum of

¹²John 10:11.

¹³*Confessions* 11,7.

¹⁴The French *siècle* means of course century, but also points to the worldhood of the world as the German *Weltlichkeit* is often translated, though it also means secularity.

¹⁵*Confessions* 13,36. To grasp better the fundamental difference between the sacred and holiness and therefore the better

time: its summation or, better still, its summons. Which, for Augustine, amounts to saying that, needful as it may be, the secularisation of time is not everything and wouldn't pretend to be. It is only one aspect of the dialectic which links the two cities—and which, for being binary, can all the more remarkably afford to shun the warmed-over dualism of the sacred and the profane. Expressive of the interface of the two cities it articulates, this dialectic not only posits the need for the secularisation of time, it also affirms the desire of its sanctification.

21. Heidegger was not wrong: it is, he wrote in 1924, “the theologian who is the specialist of time, and indeed, if memory serves us correctly, theology has had to deal with time in many different ways”.¹⁶ And for the simplest of reasons. Namely, that “the Christian faith falls into place in connection with time”; better still, “when the time is fulfilled” and, to be sure, one immediately thinks among other things of the incarnation. But does Heidegger himself really think of it too? I wonder. Especially since he contends that, because “theology treats human existence (*menschliches Dasein*) in its being before God”, it treats “its temporal being in its relation to eternity”. Very well. But then does it follow that one must drive a wedge between time and eternity, and do so under the sheer pretence that the incarnation, if not the creation, consisted of withdrawing human existence from time? Does it follow that by contrast with philosophy, theology must necessarily be viewed as bound to a God ineluctably taken for granted? This is nevertheless what Heidegger suggests when he says that, unlike the theologian, the philosopher himself will attempt to “understand time exclusively from the basis of time”, even in terms of what he will call intra-temporality. Which intra-temporality, writes Ricoeur, amounts to putting “the accent on the present, just as fundamental temporality puts it on the future and historicity puts it on the past.”¹⁷ Heidegger himself admits that intra-temporality consists of putting the accent on the how of time in such a way that, transformed, the question “what is time?” becomes the question “who is time?”¹⁸ This is the question that, from one echo to another, calls on us to witness and summons us to testify before the bar of time, and by the time it sinks into our hearing, is heard as asking “Who is the shepherd of time?” with an urgency so devoid of the least parody that one feels compelled to honour Heidegger’s obsession with exactness, not to mention his preoccupation with authenticity, especially since awake to that very question he adds: “Am I my time?” *Sein und Zeit* would only be published at least three years later, but Heidegger already puts the question and, assuming it is correctly put, infers that “then being-here would mean: to be is to be put in question.”¹⁹ And one can only surmise that, had it not been for Heidegger’s own circumspection about it, he could as well have defined the incarnation : the being through which God is here, *a fortiori*, is the being of that which is put in question.
22. “Whom do you say that I am?” That is really the question, and it is put not only by Jesus but also, in a like mood, by anyone who in Christ has passed from death to life. It is the question that, in whatever way one understands this “I”, eludes every reply, unless the Eternal One forgets himself in time—as a father does in his son—or unless God becomes man (as we used to say though the metaphor hurt even the language of faith) just as Peter heard himself told more or less abruptly;²⁰ and the question still is without reply as long as, like Cain facing up

to grasp the link between hallowing (sanctification) and secularisation, one need only compare two French translations of Jeremiah 17:22: “Sanctify the sabbath day” (Segond) and “keep it sacred” (TOB).

¹⁶Heidegger, “Le concept de temps”, *Cahiers de l’Herne* 1983, p. 27.

¹⁷Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 150.

¹⁸Heidegger, “Le concept de temps,” p. 36.

¹⁹Heidegger, “Le concept de temps,” p. 36.

²⁰Matthew 16:17.

to God, I want to escape from time, instead of “redeeming” it; or to lock it in a clock instead of locking the clock into it, or again to shortchange its data by ransoming the future or by counterfeiting the past instead of investing them in, or even vesting them with, that which precisely would time them with a “present”.

23. By contrast with the idea of time escheating itself into a downfall from which accordingly we need to rise up again to some timeless origin of a time before time, what we deal with here, is the idea of a time which is “accomplished”, i.e. which happens and comes to pass only if our liberation is not passed-by and the world is transfigured or man and woman are time and again beckoned by that which, for being human, all too human, is the very condition without which God would not be God. Such is, in the mirror of creation as of the pleroma, in the mirror of Christ, that is to say of the word, the stake of the biblical dialectic of the secularisation of time and of its hallowing—of the worlding of the Word.
24. God speaks and the thing happens: man or woman speaks and the word becomes part of them. And neither is apart from the other. On the seventh day there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female. Or the times are fulfilled, and a virtual image of the eschaton, of God’s reign, is given, even as on the third day the empty tomb is its prolepsis. Christ is risen: he dis-covers death—and, but for the divine if ironic ambiguity of language, points to death as that which, because it objectivates time—“the hour has come”²¹— forfeits its claim on life. And time is turned inside out. Easter, as Barth would say, comes before Good Friday. And Bultmann: that history is swallowed up by eschatology²². Or that time, if it has a cutting edge, cuts a covenant with God, the Eternal. Desacralising nature and its dominion, a covenant with God is woven through time which, betokening God and man and woman with one another, releases them from the shackles of the sacred as illustrated by such symbols as Egypt or the primordial *tohu-bohu*, and at the same stroke defatalises history: there is no way of genealogically linking the clay fashioned by God and the breath through which “natural man” is toppled over into the human, any more than there is between the new covenant and the old, between Israel and the Church. Nor is Abraham an ancestor but the father of all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews. And if there is continuity between them, it is not a product of nature or of history; it is created by God²³. It is a continuity broken up and indeed shared, as are the bread and wine when one has broken with the past. Breaking with the past, it breaks in the end of time, in a manner, however, ratified at Easter as being proleptic rather than anamnestic. Indeed, the *eschaton* (the ultimate) designates not only the end, the last, but also the first, the beginning. Rather than some kind of principle overriding or overrunning time, the eschaton encompasses it (Jaspers). The eschaton is its “milieu.”
25. It is anachronistic. Far from escaping from time, whether cosmological or chronological, or reducing it, the eschaton analyses it; that is to say, it deconstructs it²⁴ and, breaking through the apparent logic of temporal sequence, is the timing of a God who is not God outside of time, but takes time to be God and neither runs out of it nor is exhausted by it. And the time it takes God to be God is eschatic time. It begins and ends with the time given us once and for all, a time of decision, a time when God, equally distant from or near to us all, is all in all.²⁵

²¹Mark 14: 41; John 7: 30.

²²Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity : History and Eschatology* (Gifford Lectures 1955), Harper & Brothers, New York 1957, p. 37.

²³Bultmann, op. cit. p. 35.

²⁴Understanding, as Stanislas Breton suggests, this term of analysis as being the ancestor of deconstruction.

²⁵Although objective, the past does not remain less ambiguous: we are determined by it but not to the point of having

26. Anachronistic is again the eschaton to the extent that, from the creation to the pleroma by way of the incarnation, time which passes has no past. "Before Abraham was, I am"—as Jesus would say.²⁶ Or one could say that time does not pass, arguing with J.-B. Pontalis that "time which does not pass is not the negation of time which passes. It is the fulfillment of it". And subverted are then "all our conceptions of time: of cyclical time, if we consider the rotation of our planet or the periodic return of the seasons; evolutionary, if we refer to the development of species and of the organism; linear—not following a straight line but a broken line—if we retrace the course of human history." In brief, contradicted is "our common perception: that of the years which slip through our fingers, that of the dizzy fall of grains of sand in the hour glass, that of our days and their own rhythm, that of our bodies and spirit when we feel them gain in strength or decline."²⁷
27. What the skin is to the body the eschaton is to temporality: it encompasses it, or cloaks it if one could here risk a doubtful play on words. The psalmist does however take this kind of liberty when he says: "My times are in your hand" according to the Jerusalem Bible while Segond and the Pléiade versions read "my destiny" and, laconically or merely prosaically, the French ecumenical translation boils it down to "my hours."²⁸ But what does it matter?
28. At one and the same stroke of the eschaton, time is both measured and without measure: God times with either kind, he forms an alliance with day and night as he forms an alliance with man or woman,²⁹ and yet their days are numbered although, *sub specie aeternitatis*, they can be spent only once and for all since they have no other shepherd than the Eternal, the God who comes and, whether present or absent, is no less the Wholly Other³⁰. And not only when the word becomes flesh, but also when it creates or when it is all in all—and when, so to speak, assuming time, God forgets that he is eternal: he is God only by reason of his being contemporaneous with man even as with the world, a world which, besides, he loves so much that he sees it as a utopia, be it under the aspect of his *shekinah* or of just a tent³¹. A contemporary, more so than an ancestor, God is here and now the measure of all that is only because conversely, in Christ, man is the measure of God. Take Adam as man by the measure of whom God is known, and Adam is less the first man than he is man first. Or take Jesus, and God is not viewed in terms of man par excellence but of man tout court, of man at last or, everyman hence being the whole man, of anyone who, fulfilled, is the man for whom "to live is Christ," to live once for all—even as God, a God through whose image in man the word become flesh stands for ever "wholly everywhere and nowhere contained wholly."³² Which is another way of saying that God, like time, cannot be objectified, even though neither of them is without object; or that the quest for stability so characteristic of classical thought is a quest for a present that does not pass away.³³ For the eternal Now. An eternal Now which,

to renounce a certain capacity for decision (cf. Bultmann, op.cit, p. 141), by virtue of which we are all at an equal distance from God: unhampered by our preconceptions, predestination is perhaps an other way of saying this.

²⁶John 8:58.

²⁷J.-B. Pontalis, *Ce temps qui ne passe pas*, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 22 and pp. 11-12.

²⁸Psalms 31:15: translations which compete in vain with that of Luther (*Meine Zeit steht in deinen Heissenden*).

²⁹Jeremiah 33

³⁰Cf. Gregory of Nyssa: "It would be the object of lengthy research to know how that comes which is always present." (quoted in Jean-Marc Saint, "Celui qui vient," *Renouveau*, 7 December 1997).

³¹John 1:14.

³²Isaiah 40: 6-7; Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.3: "You fill all things, but do you fill them with your whole self? Does this mean that one part of you is greater and another smaller? Or are you present entirely everywhere at once, and no single thing contains the whole of you?"

³³Cf. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/Melbourne/Henley

caught as it may be between a beginning and an end, between birth and death, yet does not yawn between them as would a mortgaged present between past and future, but turns us into debtors towards the future rather than of the past. It credits us with the future—a *futurible* Now. It confronts us with an “either/or” which would be short of nothing less than the kind of decision (Bultmann) that, like a leap, is at one and the same time less burdened with the past than pregnant with the future. And Hegel comes to mind, does he not? But, when he reaches the conclusion that “only the present is” and so concretely, moreover, that “the real present is thus eternity”, Heidegger, not surprisingly, demurs. He shies away from such a claim. Lingered appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, he justifiably seems to me more in tune with the biblical approach to time.³⁴ Still somewhat harassed by the objectifying historicistic trappings of some surrogate would-be biblical “already/not yet” dialectic, he writes: “The being of time is the now, but to the extent that every now is no longer ‘now’ or is not yet ‘now’, it can be equally grasped as non-being”. To my mind, he senses that, although such a dialectic might be derived from the biblical tradition, it curbs the latter’s eschatic dimension. It historicises eschatology, reducing salvation to its history. Now, the biblical dialectic of temporality does not rest on some time differential caught between “already” and “not yet”. It is, instead, funded ultimately by the proleptic deferral of timing, as underlined by expressions such as “in spite of”, “and yet” (*et tamen*).³⁵ We must always remember, in this connection, that, centred on the Law, the Ark of the Covenant is empty. It has no other “milieu” than the Torah, the Word of God, by which it is encompassed. Or again remember that the tomb is likewise empty, and yet “he” lives.

29. The biblical approach to time is eschatological. With Paul, it is determined by an anthropology focussing on the ethic of faith, that is, on a mutual iconoclastic questioning of God and man: In the world, says Paul, there are no Gods, only idols. And were it not for these idols—or perhaps just because of them—it, too, is empty: therein lies its worldhood. It comes into its own, and is worlded but only insofar as it is worlded through faith or, better still, insofar as the Word is worlded. Eschatically. And just because this ethic of the worlding of the Word can only be eschatic, it is also an ethic of time, an ethic so to speak of the third day, when the tomb is empty—or, similarly, when in the beginning, “the earth was without form and void”. Ethics postulates a new creation, especially if, moreover, it is an ethic of faith for which a new thing is ever possible in spite of the old; for which, in other words, the impossible is the only thing possible. To wit, the supposed quarrel between ethics and morals. Often somewhat arbitrarily construed in opposition to the moral, the contemporary fascination with the ethical intimates at least a desire for the new, an expectation of the impossible as the only thing possible. Not surprisingly, and justifiably, in the wake of a nascent technological order, the quest for ethical norms seems bent on displacing, on disqualifying the age-old compact between morality and an increasingly hypothetical Natural Law. And, to that extent, even if the alleged discrepancy between “moral” and “ethical” may only be a fad, at best a matter of linguistic idiosyncrasy, it is no less instructive. An ethic of time, a temporal ethic, is a temporary ethic, inevitably. It is provisional—in view of a Promised Land or the Kingdom of God, if one should want illustrations from the Bible. Not that time implies a relativistic ethic or that it relativises morality. On the contrary, because time both retrieves or even cancels the old and heralds the new, because it allows or suffers both iteration and innovation, do’s and don’ts as well as either/or, time is at one and the same time delegation and obligation: it radicalises ethics.

1982, p; 108sq.

³⁴Heidegger, *Etre et temps*, Authentica, Paris 1985, p. 292 (*Sein und Zeit*, p. 431).

³⁵Or to the “as if”. Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:29-30; 2 Cor. 4: 7-11.

The ethic of faith is an ethic of time secularised and an ethic of time redeemed, hallowed. Time is not second-hand eternity; it is a timing of the eternal. Or, as Calvin writes (in his Commentary on Colossians 4:5) an “opportunity for the good”, which we must “seize,”³⁶ not to mention the *kairos* (pace Tillich), we must all the while redeem, even though, in this text from Paul, this very *kairos* seems to have lost itself, dulled into *chronos*. Just like time and eternity or ethical and moral, words are porous to one another. From Hebrew to Greek, we must not forget that the Bible uses several words for time or temporality and, as James Barr has shown, it is impossible to extract from it a unified concept.³⁷ In fact, borrowing from Lacan, we could say that, for the Bible, time “is-not-everything”. Eternity likewise. And no more than the whole of wholes for a mathematician, does the “all”-totality-exist for the Bible. Man and woman cannot become one, unless they remain two (Lacan). Nor is any one of them simply by default the other, much less in opposition to the other. I am who I am, but only in relation with an other. Relation, a matter of time, postulates otherness, especially if it must grow into mutual respect as well as self-respect, and into that kind of solidarity which transcends tribalism, whether cultural or religious, racial or sexual. The dialectic of otherness has thus nothing to do with the overtly—or covertly—conflictual dialectic of opposites, nor does it condone the surrogate, condescending if not altogether exclusivistic ideology of difference. Otherness is neither difference nor indifference.

30. When, with the Psalmist, we say : “The Lord—the Eternal—is my shepherd: I lack nothing”, we state a twofold affirmation. On the one hand, that human and divine aren’t ever to be confused one with the other any more than heaven and earth, which likewise form less a whole made up of parts than a whole of wholes and yet are not confused one with the other; and, on the other hand, that neither makes sense separately, but each comes into its own through the other. In particular, God and man are not related as would be two opposites, complementing or competing with one another. Nor is their relationship one of difference or of indifference, but of otherness. And otherness pertains to the eschatic rather than the historical or natural order. Foreclosed is accordingly any attempt to objectify God. And the human condition which thus becomes the very condition of God, is brought to light in its utter autonomy: man, though he takes himself for God or simply denies God whether by owning or disowning him, does not remain less mortal. It is his nature. And being mortal he lives out his life without the least expectation of any kind of substitute for death, or of the least metempsychosis. Once for all he can only hold himself accountable for the time imparted to him, and redeem it, should he be himself redeemed, that is, honour his mortal nature by living up to it rather than defrauding it. Thus time neutralises nature, which knows no evil. It also radicalises God, who hates evil and not only confronts man with a choice between life and death but goes so far as to love Jacob and hate Esau. God hates to waste time. And time wasted is time not timing with itself. Or, for that matter, with God. We must, in this connection, revisit the notion of predestination and, particularly giving Calvin his due, realise that the “pre” of predestination does not signify that our destiny has been determined before any merit on our part, but that it can only be and is assumed in spite of what we deserve or do not deserve. It serves to stress that, but for the grace of God, we would all be condemned to death. Nature being what it is, Calvin does not say that we are mortal because we are sinful. Rather, he says that, being mortal, we can only be sinful before God and that, if before God we should only be sinners, we should have no choice other than death. There must be

³⁶Calvin, *Commentaires sur le Nouveau Testament* IV, Société des livres religieux, Toulouse 1894, p.85.

³⁷James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, SCM Press, London, 1962.

and is another choice.³⁸ What he is affirming is nothing other than what Paul says when he writes that “death is the wages of sin.”³⁹ Rather than to some archaeology or genealogy of time, predestination is meant to point out its an-archy, i.e. its *kairos*--that which defatalises even while unfolding history, goaded as it is by the crook of that shepherd of time who is the Eternal.

31. In speaking of time the Bible feels no need to stick with a single word but uses several and, more ironically still, seems unperturbed by its apparent lack of a definite word for eternity. Like the weather, nothing is even for the Bible more changeable than time. Except perhaps the word. Nothing--not even the seasons--reflects the mood of time better than language. The biblical tradition is governed by the primacy of the word. That is why it is an iconoclastic tradition or, as the case may be, prophetic, or hermeneutic. Significantly, it accordingly is a tradition for which, as a general rule, the meaning of words depends on their use--as do utensils. A kettle is not determined by the shape or the form of a utensil, but by its use.⁴⁰ A word is likewise that which goes on acquiring meaning. From one phrase to another, it does not necessarily have the meaning it had at first. In some way a word already consists not so much in maintaining as in translating its meaning. From one language to another, as it were. So much so that the Hebrew *Ôlam* is rendered in Greek by *aion* which in turn becomes *saeculum* in Latin, while *pleroma* indifferently refers to *chronos* as well as *kairos*, and *kairos* itself is used alike to indicate both an opportunity and a season,⁴¹ not to mention finally, “the grace which has been given us in Jesus Christ before eternity,”⁴² which, in Greek, becomes *pro chronon aionion* and in Latin is rendered by *ante tempora saecularia*!
32. Paradox of time: it is infinite so long as it has not come to an end. So long as it is in the hands of God, of the Eternal. Even of the One under whom Isaiah stands and tries to understand through that most audacious language--that of the prophet who upsets every preconceived idea, whether it sanctions some sacred chain of Being or charts a particular logic of time. Unfazed, he declares “You are my witnesses, says the Eternal....Before me, no god was formed, and after me there will be none....You are my witnesses, says the Eternal, and I am God.”⁴³ Without man, God is not God, and still less is the Eternal a shepherd. Which amounts to saying that man-- even Jewish man--is the man who knows that he is not God. But then is it enough for a man to know it?
33. Indeed, if Jesus is the Christ through whom God is not God without man or is a God “who becomes man” or, better still, is a God whose word embodies man, then what this means is that, unlike the Jew who knows that man is not God, Jesus is a Jew who does not take himself for God. Not only does he know that he is mortal, but also that he must die. He dies--at one with himself if not with God, and alone. And even God is spared death: God is no dying and rising God. Jesus simply “temporalises” God, just as the incarnation secularises time. His timely death enfranchises God no less from the history of the nations (Luke) than from that of Israel (Matthew), much as Israel once was freed from the shackling gods of nature. In Christ, God happens, he comes to pass through the human and, once and for all, time passing

³⁸Cf. Gabriel Vahanian, *La condition de Dieu*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1970, and *No Other God*, George Braziller, New York 1966.

³⁹Romans 6: 23.

⁴⁰Cicero, *De natura deorum* I,XXX/V 95: “ésed usu mollienda nobis verba sunt.” Cf also Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, p. 93.

⁴¹Jeremiah 8:7, 1 Corinthians 2:7.

⁴²2 Timothy 1:9.

⁴³Isaiah 43: 10-12.

is no past time. Or, to repeat, God is not an ancestor but a father, indeed an adoptive Father. "You are my witnesses, you whom I have chosen,"⁴⁴ says the Eternal in whom "we have life, movement and being,"⁴⁵ in whom we have time, about which, addressing us as he did Job, he reminds us of what is at stake, throwing in our face: "The rain, has it a father?"⁴⁶ Wretched father, who would be father only according to nature! Or would be only in order to prove that the natural order was off-limits to the Eternal! But God is neither to be assimilated with nature nor a stranger to it. And biblical time is neither cyclic nor linear. Not that it ignores the seasons or "the year, the day, the hour: these are concepts which are inseparable from the biblical witness to the divine revelation."⁴⁷ And so they are, however, only in the light of the Sabbath.

34. The biblical approach to time is sabbatical. It calls for the hallowing of time. Liturgical would, therefore, be just as appropriate a description of it. And because the hallowing of time hinges ultimately on the secularisation of the Eternal Now, and conversely the latter on the former, this approach is ruled, not by an anamnestic process, but by the proleptic dialectic of sin and grace, in other words of the incarnation, of the worlding of the Word. This is a dialectic of which the two horns can also be described as nature (desacralised) and history (defatalised) or as creation and pleroma. Or again it is a dialectic of the eschaton and the novum and hence is eminently liturgical, though not necessarily in the mystical so much as in the ethical, social, political sense of public action the term originally referred to. As interface of the eternal and the temporal, of heaven and earth, of church and world, the liturgy thus aims less to "represent" the Eternal than to secularise it (preaching) insofar as, conversely, it aims at the sanctification of time (sacrament).⁴⁸ Essentially proleptic, the liturgy is a prophetic act. But, since this act involves the so-called priesthood of all believers, the liturgy must of necessity entwine the religious and the secular. And, in this sense, the liturgy can also be viewed as a charismatic act. It consists in redeeming the time when the opportunity presents itself—or when the word becomes flesh.
35. Barth himself did not fail to stress it: "The word has become flesh" means also "the word has become time"⁴⁹ and that the time is fulfilled. As happens at Easter. Or even as already happens when God blesses the seventh day and hallows it and "thus the world is being worlded all the while it is created [through the Word]"⁵⁰—and, from beginning to end, God makes all things new.⁵¹
36. Still, is there anything which, like the new, reminds us more of the old, indeed of the past, even while timing us with the future? On the seventh day, the sabbath does just that. As symbolic of the kingdom of God, it stands for the otherness of time and ushers in the end

⁴⁴Isaiah 43:10, Amos 3:2, Matthew 12:18.

⁴⁵Acts 17: 28.

⁴⁶Job 38:28.

⁴⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1, ¶36.1.

⁴⁸Cf. Gabriel Vahanian, "En ce jour-là: la structure eschatologique de la liturgie", *Temporalité et aliénation* (Enrico Castelli, ed.) Aubier/Montaigne, Paris 1975); "Pour une éthique des sacrements", *Les sacrements de Dieu*, (Joseph Moingt, ed.) Recherches de science religieuse, Paris 1987; or again my proposal about liturgy, *Renouveau* 2 March, 1996.

⁴⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, ¶14, I. In his Gifford Lectures, instead of incarnation, Emil Brunner even suggested intemporation (*Christianity and Civilisation* 1, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1948, p.50) whereas intemporalisation is nowadays put forward by J.-P. Manigne (*Les Figures du temps: Poétique de la foi* II, Cerf, Paris 1991). Cf. equally Michael Wyschogrod, "Seen and Heard Commands: Ethics and the Metaphysics of Time" and Gabriel Vahanian, "In Praise of the Secular", *Philosophie de la religion entre éthique et ontologie* (Marco Maria Olivetti, ed.) Cedam, Padua 1996.

⁵⁰Genesis 2:4.

⁵¹Apocalypse 21:5.

of time, its fullness. But this fullness of time or its eschatic otherness, what is it if not, time and again, an opportunity for its ultimate rehearsal, its kairos—world without end? Enduring time, such is the sabbath which breaks with nature; and even breaks with time that passes as it breaks with the ritual of the six days which precede it, and yet is their fulfillment. And, just because it then fulfils no less than God's own work, it also breaks with the ritual of work: work does not exhaust God any more than time exhausts eternity.

37. Or, to quote Ecclesiastes, time is only when, world without end, there is a time for everything⁵²—that is, when the Word is being worlded. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease."[^49] In the eschatic perspective of the sabbath, time is infinite as long as it is not ended—fulfilled. But then it is neither finite nor infinite. Towed, as it were, by the Sabbath in its eschatic thrust, time is the de-negation of the self-negation that would befall time if it were without beginning and end. And were it hypothetically eternal, eternity would only be the negation, not the de-negation of time. But temporal is by contrast that de-negation which occurs *on* time as well as *in* time—world without end. And fulfilled is at last man or woman—*ecce homo*—whose days are numbered and who, instead of dying from it, lives up to it once and for all.

Footnotes

[^49]: Genesis 8:22.

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