Time and Eternity: *Antje Jackelén's Theological Study*

with James M. Byrne, "Theological Methodology, Classical Theism, and 'Lived Time' in Antje Jackelén's Time and Eternity*"; Varadaraja V. Raman, "There's More to Time than Ticking Away"; Hubert Meisinger, "The Rhythm of God's Eternal Music: On Antje Jackelén's* Time and Eternity*"; John R. Albright, "*Time and Eternity: *Hymnic, Biblical, Scientific, and Theological Views"*

THE RHYTHM OF GOD'S ETERNAL MUSIC: ON ANTJE JACKELÉN'S *TIME AND ETERNITY*

by Hubert Meisinger

Abstract. Antje Jackelén's book *Time and Eternity* is a thorough and carefully presented theology of time and, by its very essence, an incomplete and open thought model because time will always be dynamic and relational. This approach is an excellent example for the dialogue between science and religion because it uses resources not tapped in the dialogue so far: hymn-books stemming from Germany, Sweden, and the English-speaking world published between 1975 and 1995. They are taken as resources for a critical investigation on the meaning and importance of the notion of eternity for the interdisciplinary dialogue, which is characterized not as a synthesis but as holding a beneficial tension, or "eutonia." I suggest that this approach can be taken even further by merging it with a model of time developed by the German mathematician A. M. Klaus Müller: The crossing over of time modes in a relational matrix of time also gives clear insights into the time of God not only as *futurum*—time as extrapolation of the past and present—but also as *adventus*—time which is to come.

Keywords: eschatology; eternity; eutonia; hope; relationality; (matrix of) time

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Antje Jackelén's book on time and eternity reminds me of an experience I had some years ago:

It is cold outside. Winter has come and snow is falling. I enter a pretty little Baroque church that is crowded with people because the service is being broadcast on television. I sit down on one of those benches you often find in churches that are not too comfortable. I am a bit early and thus have time to talk with my neighbor. Suddenly, the conversation is interrupted by a regular and steady tone that I have never heard in the church but sounds like the beat of an old clock—tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock. Oh, yes, I remember the sound. It is the sound of the clockwork of the church, obviously recorded and transmitted into the church. Tick, tock, tick, tock. Then, the music begins to play. The organ takes up the rhythm of the clockwork and follows it. A clarinet likewise begins to play, also following the rhythm of the clockwork. But I do not hear the clock any more because its sound is overridden by the music. And now the music ceases to follow the rhythm that was set by the clockwork. It speeds up and slows down. It is loud and quiet. It sounds angry and smooth. It is thunderstorm and sunshine. It is like dancing and standing. It leaves me far behind and comes near to me. It strikes me. It is overwhelmingly alive.

Readers also may have experiences that will resonate with what Jackelén is talking about in *Time and Eternity* ([2002] 2005)—resonances concerning her investigation of hymn-books with respect to time and eternity, her discussion of time in the Bible and in theology, her approach to the notion of time in the structure of scientific theories, and finally her careful and deliberate development of aspects of a theology of time.

Jackelén, Bishop of Lund, Sweden, does not put herself in the foreground but thinks and argues very carefully, thoroughly, and to the point. These characteristics mark this investigation, which is a revised version of her doctoral thesis accepted by Lund University, originally published in German and Swedish, and now in English. This translation enables her to reach even more readers in cultures different from the European and to deal with the science-and-religion dialogue in different ways.

The book is shaped by the author's experiences in both the Continental European dialogue, especially in Germany, and also the Scandinavian and Anglo-American dialogues. Thus it bridges gaps between different styles of conducting the dialogue. Cultural plurality marks this study from its outset. The first part of her investigation, after an introduction and hermeneutical setting, deals with the notions of time and eternity in six different hymn-books stemming from Germany (Protestant *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* and Catholic *Gotteslob*), Sweden (*Den Svenska Psalmboken* and *Psalmer I 90-talet*), and the English-speaking world (*The Australian Hymn Book with Catholic Supplement* and *Sing Alleluia: A Supplement to The Australian Hymn Book*), all published between 1975 and 1995.

But how does she bridge the gap hermeneutically? Bridging the gap is a strong and valuable metaphor. Is it best suited for her approach? To be honest and to the point, no. Bridging the gap brings to my mind such associations as building a bridge to drive easily from one side of the bridge to the other; going back and forth in the same vehicle and as the same persons, without any necessary change in character, style or attitude. Someone else constructs the bridge; I only use it. With these associations in mind, one can hardly say that they conform to Jackelén's intentions as expressed in the hermeneutical positioning that she undertakes in her introduction. She identifies two hermeneutical precepts and two tasks of theology. The hermeneutical precepts are a natural longing for the dialogue between science and theology and the intention for the dialogue partners to encounter each other. The dialogue is marked by a reciprocal critical relation in the sense of beneficial tension ("eutonia"), not synthesis; its aim is that science and theology live together practically. Accordingly, the tasks of theology are identified as the critique of reductionism and advocacy for a broader public to open up a forum that enables intellectual and social contact.

Let me turn to the notion of a reciprocal critical relation, because relationality is central to the book. I compare it with the approach of a Danish theologian, Viggo Mortensen, who shares the European, Scandinavian, and Anglo-American horizon and also the intention not to build an all-too-harmonious synthesis between science and religion. The metaphors he uses are "friendly reciprocity" ("*freundschaftliche Wechselwirkung*," Mortensen 1995, 262) or "lively reciprocity or organic interaction" ("*lebendige Wechselwirkung oder organische Interaktion*," p. 267). He develops this idea using insights of the Danish philosopher Knud E. Løgstrup who illustrates by means of the classical Christian doctrine of the two natures of Christ what it means theologically to talk about a unifying opposition fertilizing both sides: Scientific and theological insights or beliefs should be neither intermingled nor separated from each other. This is a very strong approach with a lot of practical consequences that are developed in Mortensen's book, but what it lacks is a clear positive statement about the dialogue—although this also could be called its strength. Jackelén tries hard, and convincingly, to provide such positive statements about the relationship throughout her book, using such terms as "to complement," "to irritate," "to correct," and "to be touched." "Beneficial tension" may be the strongest, since she dwells in the semantic field that is made up by musical metaphors such as dancing—arising rather naturally because the focus of her investigation in the first chapter is the language of time and eternity in several different hymn-books.

In her detailed phenomenological analysis of the language of time and eternity in the hymn-books, Jackelén comes to the conclusion that the perspective of eternity is largely lost in modern hymns whereas it played an

essential role in older ones. To be more precise, whereas in older hymns the lifetime of humans is a kind of prelude for what really is essential, eternity, in modern hymns the task of eternity is to make present time worth living. To her mind this reflects the outlook on life and time in our day, which is characterized by the feeling of not having enough time. Following Marianne Gronemeyer (1993), she characterizes contemporary humans as *Homo accelerandus*, those who lose time entirely since eternity is functionalized as a qualification of time and not an opposition to it.

I focus here on both Jackelén's phenomenological approach and the question of the *Homo accelerandus*. She discusses the hymns on a phenomenological level, investigating the experiences of belief and life that are expressed and worked on in them. This is a very rich and valuable approach, especially in contrast to a purely dogmatic investigation of the notion of time, which does not at all fall within the scope of the hymns. Her focus on investigating how experiences of belief and life are formulated in hymns is part of the advocacy for a broader public, which she has already explicated as one of the two tasks of theology. I understand this as a clear sign of her aim to elaborate a consistent and competent theology—and, indeed, she demonstrates considerable theological and hymnal competence. Nevertheless, she could have given more attention to how hymns not only reflect experiences of time and eternity but also influence, shape, and create such experiences. People who sing hymns also learn to evaluate their perception of reality by using the categories they find precast in those hymns, be it affirmatively or dismissively. This may not be within the scope of her investigation, but it could be a valuable addition to what she has done so thoroughly. She reflects concern for this shaping effect of humans in her occasional comments on whether the theology in some modern hymns is too superficial.

The *Homo accelerandus*, her second main point of interest, is a very debatable, controversial, and disputed description of human beings in our time. Although the experience of a lack of time is a common one in the societies most *Zygon* readers live in, how to interpret and evaluate this experience is controversial. Jackelén suggests that the feeling that there never is enough time is due to the withdrawal of eternity in favor of time. The acceleration of time is accompanied by the loss of rhythms and differences and a focus on the midst of life instead of the end of life.

Deceleration is a word highly prominent in that context. Coined by Fritz Reheis (2003) and extensively described by Karlheinz A. Geißler (2004), in the German context deceleration may have different meanings. Reheis pleads for a real deceleration to avoid growing manic acceleration and to reach an era of slowness (again?). In contrast, Geißler argues that modernity is characterized by "acceleration through growing speed," whereas it is a sign of postmodernity that the understanding of time is "acceleration through contemporaneity"—or, in other words, not "need for speed" any

more but contemporaneity of different things for those whom he names "simultants." Simultants long for the condensation of contemporaneity and have already said goodbye to the former "chronometrical monotheism" (Geißler 2004, 15). But they also have accepted that contemporaneity is not necessarily accompanied by progress or the good. Geißler even assumes that simultants, that is, we modern human beings, disconnect against our very own nature and longings from a better time—that is, from the ideal of living in time wholesomely and at high speed (Geißler 2004, 16).[1]

In our context of reflecting about Jackelén's book, these considerations enable us to reinforce another of her important insights: the notion of newness that breaks into current time unexpectedly and with great impact. The coming of Jesus, for example, is portrayed as something new in some hymns. In the dialogue between science and religion, the Swiss astrophysicist Arnold Benz ([1997] 2000) points to newness and hope as decisive elements in the dialogue. According to his investigation, "appearance of newness" can be found in both science and religion, but hope and its evocation is something characteristic only for religion. Science does not communicate hope but only keeps a space free for it. Benz even formulates a new "I am" saying of Jesus to express his hope, which reads as follows: "Jesus says: I am the truly new. Whoever trusts in me shares in a meaningful world, despite decay and death, even when the Sun burns out, the Earth spins off into space and the universe disintegrates" ([1997] 2000, 164). This saying using modern metaphors[2] is an interesting blend of descriptions of time as prolegomena for eternity, and eternity as qualifying our current time. Time is not an infinitely short presence any more but receives duration, namely the duration of waiting until newness comes. Newness in the sense of advent, or that which comes (*adventus*), not future that is an extrapolation of the past and present (*futurum*), is a distinction that is highly important for Jackelén in developing her theology of time later in the book where she discusses eschatology.

We turn now to her second chapter, which deals with the notion of time in the Bible and in theology. Her starting point is a book by Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Anmerkungen zur theologischen Auffassung des Zeitproblems* (*Comments on Theological Conceptions of the Problem of Time* [1954]), who categorizes time as either transitoriness, historical time, or lack of time and opts for a relational, interactive model for the relationship of time and eternity instead of dualistic and antithetical thinking. To Jackelén's mind this is a suitable starting point for an interdisciplinary investigation on the notions and relationship of time and eternity. Nevertheless, she critically discusses Ratschow, along with several other modern writers, on the notions of time and/or eternity, working out the critique as part of the process of formulating her own theology of time.

As far as the Bible is concerned, she shows that a dualism between cyclic and linear time is inadequate, as is that between time and eternity. Both pairings should be related to and distinguished from each other dialectically. Especially important for the process of her investigation is the dynamic tension between *already* and *not yet* that characterizes the understanding of time in the New Testament and will be the most important characterization of eschatology at the end of her investigation where she aims at a pluralistic notion of time.

When she deals with theological approaches to time she stresses the notion of death as both transition and finality. Death is *the* crisis of relation, since in death relationship is lost. Because technology tries to dissolve eschatology, according to Zygmunt Bauman, whom she refers to in this context (see Bauman 1992), the perspective of eternity gets lost, she believes: "Metaphorically expressed, in a closed system, time suffocates itself; given the loss of eternity, time dies the death of non-relationality" (Jackelén [2002] 2005, 113). Bauman says that protestant pilgrims do not exist anymore but have converted to postmodern people on their way between places without relations anymore. Jackelén also speaks about contemporaneity, not in the sense Geißler mentioned but in the sense of an equivalence of moments: Identities do not exist any more, only change and metamorphosis. *Now* is the moment of happiness, and there is no longer any hope in death. In contrast, Jackelén develops theological criteria for a Christian understanding of death in which the notion of God's faithfulness and constancy in building consistent relations with humankind, even in case of death, is central.

In a kind of interim result she reflects on eternity as the *other* of time—an important insight that is developed in relation to Emmanuel Levinas and will appear again in her investigation. Such an understanding escapes the extremes of both a static dualism and an encompassing relativism. She also takes a first look at trinitarian models in theology, which she appreciates as far as their strength is to think in relational and dynamic terms. Their weakness, according to Jackelén, is that it is impossible to relate a single trinitarian person to a single time frame—an issue she discusses more intensively at the end of her book. Nevertheless, an important insight is that an adequate understanding of time cannot be achieved without taking into account a relation between time and eternity.

The third chapter deals with the notion of time in the structure of scientific theories. Before she explores the history of science with respect to the notion of time Jackelén clarifies her concept of the dialogue between science and theology: It is less an encompassing synthesis of different systems than an engagement to discuss specific questions where science and theology deal with the same reality but from different backgrounds and in different languages. Even though a consensus is not possible, it is both possible and wise for us to carry out dialogue on a range of questions that

is inexhaustible. This proposal is shaped from her knowledge of the difference between the Anglo-American and the European approaches in science and religion: The Anglo-American approach is not influenced as much by a dialectical theology and the Kantian challenge to the concept of a natural theology as the European is, and thus the insight that religion can benefit from science is more prevalent in the Anglo-American scene. Such an approach that takes both traditions into consideration has to be very careful and discreet.

To Jackelén's mind, time turns out to be a highly attractive theme for the dialogue between theology and science because the scientific understanding of time, with its interest in relationality, its fuzziness as price for its dynamic, the plurality of notions of time, and the openness of time, should be able to help improve the outmoded notion of time in theology. In a first approximation, she characterizes time as not marching but dancing—a metaphor that she has found in several publications on time and that will be very important for her understanding and use of images to explain the dynamic and complex notions and relatedness of time and eternity. When she uses the dancing metaphor she has something very positive and active in mind.

Having discussed time in Newtonian, relativistic and quantum physics, thermodynamics, and chaos theory, Jackelén concludes with a "relationality and multiplicity of time" in physics that has supplanted the strong principle of causality and is open toward the future. The notion of chance also plays an important role because its scientific understanding can build up a creative tension to a theology in which there is a primacy of potentiality over against actuality/reality. With respect to the question of truth she notes that "*nihil veritas, ubi non relationes*"—there is no truth where there are no relations.

What strikes me in this chapter is that Jackelén says that theologians may be blamed for their ignorance of relevant scientific facts, whereas this is not as true for scientists with respect to theology. This does not accord with her later critique of Paul Davies and Stephen Hawking, whom she reproaches for not taking into account progress in theological perception. Indeed, to my mind—and here I deviate from her understanding of science—science has to take into account not only the "facts" it deals with but also the derivation of those scientific facts and their social and ethical implications. Transgression of boundaries, for example the influence of religion on scientific theory making, is part of science and not something outside it, an insight of which scientists should become aware. This is more than asking for awareness of one's scientific limits. Nevertheless, I share her conclusion that scientific theories and theological models do not exist separately but can enrich each other mutually. Both tell important "stories of the world" (p. 177, referring to Lash 1988, 208) that can be related to each other by integrating different types of knowledge[3] without losing

rationality at all. Science, to her mind, can become aware that it suffers from an eschatological deficit.

With respect to theology and what it can gain from this dialogue, we turn to the book's final chapter. In it Jackelén carefully and deliberately develops "aspects of a theology of time" with special reference to relational thinking oriented toward the future, the doctrine of Trinity, and the notion of eschatology. She favors an eschatological and dynamic model to define the relationship between time and eternity where both being and becoming have to be similarly articulated. The notion of dynamism tries to integrate both being and becoming. And she explicitly formulates a theological-mathematical model for the time-spatial incarnation of God in Jesus Christ with the help of complex numbers. Mathematicians may be able to evaluate this effort better than I, but what she wants to demonstrate with respect to the incarnation is convincing: description of relationality in the light of alterity; a dynamical understanding and the possibility of an inclusive interpretation of incarnation.

Very important is her displacement of the dialogue's center of gravity from substance to relation. Whereas thinking in substances is aligned to the past as orientation to what is, relational thinking is aligned to the future as orientation to what is possible or potential. Applied to theology, this means that we have to get rid of an absolute, static, theistic notion of God to gain a dynamic and relational notion of God that gets along more easily with modern scientific insights in physics—not in a Whiteheadian sense, which could as well inspire her approach, but within a trinitarian model. When she discusses these trinitarian models in theology it is especially important for her to note the complexity of God instead of the more frequently discussed simplicity. To her mind, however, trinitarian models do not really do justice to the relation of God, time, and eternity, although they are better than a one-dimensional understanding of God characteristic, for, say, Newton.

Thus Jackelén turns toward eschatology as key for a relational understanding of time. "Eschatology is the theological place where the most can be said about a relational theology of time. Eschatology allows reflection upon time as multi-temporality or a complexity of times—indeed it even demands such reflection" (p. 198). What can we hope for? is not speculation about future events but a spectrum of existential questions—questions with an appellative character that influence people's ways of living. She clearly shows that some scientific approaches to eschatology, especially in cosmology (Frank Tipler, Freeman Dyson), are far too simple in their understanding of eschatology; in addition to other criticisms, the tension between already and not-yet is missing. Furthermore, they aim at an accumulation of information instead of getting rid of the bad, which is a characteristic component of biblical eschatology—and, by the way, characteristic also of older hymns where bad times without belief were problematic.

Jackelén does not explicitly note this parallel between hymns and eschatology in scientific and theological perspective, but she prepares one for it and makes it obvious. In a kind of summary, her evaluation of scientific approaches is that they are models of hibernation, not models that reflect the new creation of God. Within eschatology, and reflecting on Georg Picht's approach to time, Jackelén stresses the insight that a suitable understanding of time has two centers of gravity, present and future, and thus should aim at openness. Clearly, philosophical approaches of the twentieth century have stressed the primacy of the future. Jackelén goes further and distinguishes between a future that is extrapolation from past and present and an adventive future marked by "coming"—a distinction that is tenable within a relational understanding of time but meaningless in a linear one that takes only scientific insights into account. The French language helps to clarify this distinction, because in contrast to English and German it employs two different words to refer to the future, *future* and *avenir*. Future in the sense of *future* is a kind of extrapolation from what exists and can clearly be found in the belief in progress in science and technology. Future in the sense of *avenir* is a future from ahead (Augustine), a future in which we can expect the coming of the faithful God. This distinction is a theological one that cannot be mirrored in scientific insights.[4] Eschatology, she says, places coming before becoming and thus provokes the *futurum* by the *adventus*.

This insight is different from the common one that only distinguishes between being and becoming, reflecting *futurum* instead of *adventus* only. Eschatology bestows—following Paul Ricoeur—*Ipseidentity*, not *Idem-identity*, by which he means that in eschatological perspective our identity is constituted by receiving oneself from someone else instead of preserving oneself by oneself. It is hope that does not focus on oneself. Eschatology is communicative and multidimensional in sustaining identity not by becoming aware of oneself but, in Jackelén's words, by relation and by "the receiving of oneself from an Other. This must then always imply a coming-to-the-Other and a coming-together" (p. 219). It is a "communicative genesis of selfhood" (p. 219, following Theunissen 1997, 360).

Before she arrives at her final summary, Jackelén once more stresses the already mentioned insight that the dynamic of already and not-yet is the quintessence of Christian eschatology—compatible with scientific insights, especially in chaos theory, as she shows, but not derivable from them.

At this point I want to reflect on a model of time that Jackelén mentions but does not discuss in detail. It is a matrix of time developed mainly by the mathematician A. M. Klaus Müller, who takes up insights of Picht, as Jackelén also does (p. 225f.), but with different focus. Müller stresses that a linear understanding of time is in a sense constructed or "prepared," as a technician makes a preparation for experimental purposes (*präparierte Zeit*, Müller 1972). The reduction of time on a straight line is functional in

classical mechanics but does not adequately represent the reality of time, an insight that can easily be shared by Jackelén.

In his next step, Müller differs from Jackelén. He focuses not so much on the relation of modes of time—past, present, future—but on the crossing over (*Verschränkung*) of time modes. We can talk about the past only from the perspective of the present; we cannot talk about how past times have talked about themselves. We can talk about our present time only from the perspective of our present time. We cannot know how people in the past have thought about their future, which is our present and our future, because we know the past only through the filter of the present, not directly. We can talk about the future only from the perspective of our present; we cannot know how the future will reflect on its present then. Thus, there exist nine different crossings of past (pa), present (pr), and future (fu):[5]

FuPa	–	FuPr	–	FuFu
|		|		|
PrPa	–	PrPr	–	PrFu
|		|		|
PaPa	–	PaPr	–	PaFu

Gerhard Liedke has tried to interpret this matrix theologically (Liedke 1974, following Achtner, Kunz and Walter [1998] 2002, 167–70): Whereas the horizontal line PrPa – PrPr – PrFu are the modes of what can be objectivized and thus are the sphere of sciences, the vertical line FuPr – PrPr – PaPr reflects the field of art and mythos. He assumes that the four points in the corner—PaPa, PaFu, FuFu, and FuPa—shed light on time from the standpoint of belief: times that do not entail the present, except indirectly. It is time that is not at our disposal.

Because Jackelén does not stress the past much but rather focuses on the future, let me relate FuFu, PrFu, and PaFu to what she has developed. *Future* can be correlated with PrFu. It is scientific progress, also successful in technology. PaFu can be related, in her argumentation, also to science, namely chaos theory, which reflects about the coming of what cannot be foreseen on the basis of the past (Jackelén [2002] 2005, 211). In that respect she differs from Liedke's interpretation. FuFu mirrors the *advent*, the "truly new" (Benz [1997] 2000, 164), the advent of the faithful God. However, in a sharp distinction from the interpretation of Achtner, Kunz, and Walter, Jackelén also stresses a dynamic model of God in which God cannot really be "everything in everything" but *relates to* everything, always anew. This fascinating theological insight of her investigation could be developed even more by taking the matrix above into account and reflecting on how exactly the time of God is part of that relational matrix of time.

Time—and this is her final conclusion—is no abstraction but is "lived time," dynamic and relational. Time is time of life with all its connections. Thus there cannot exist a closed, for-all-time existing theology of time but only a thought model that leaves room for openness. God is not deterministic but has long ago left the house of Newton—or has never been in it, a fact, Jackelén complains, still not realized by many theologians to this day. And I dare to say not by many scientists as well. Yet more and more theologians have begun to realize that we can no longer knock at Newton's door to say hello to God. To use one of her central metaphors, we should invite God to dance and follow the rhythm of God's music, as I followed the rhythm of the organ and the clarinet in the service described at the beginning of this essay.

I conclude by again relating to music. An important feature of music is that it can be played again and again, in many variations, in different styles and with different instruments. A single piece, though it may have reached a clear ending, still bears the character of a fragment. Jackelén finishes her book with a quote from Augustine, *Confessions* IV, 8,13: "The times are not empty, nor do they roll idly through our senses: They work remarkable things in the mind." I close my reflections with a citation that could be seen as a complement to her Augustinian one: "Writing about time results in a fragment. About time nothing ultimate exists, nothing complete and nothing exhaustive. 'HOLD THE LINE! [Stay tuned!]'" (Geißler 2005, 210)[6]

Notes

1. Wolfgang Achtner, Stefan Kunz, and Thomas Walter ([1998] 2002, 174) reflect about similar issues under the heading of "a kind of illness of time"—an expression worth thinking about.
2. On his use of metaphors compare Benz [1997] 2000, 157–61.
3. On the question of knowledge and wisdom in science and theology compare Meisinger, Drees, and Liana 2005; 2006.
4. Reinhold Esterbauer (1996) stresses even more that there does not exist one understanding of time in science, philosophy, and theology.
5. Müller even goes one step further and thinks about what he calls *"Zeitspiel"* ("time game"): an iteration of the dual modes of time on themselves, which would make up a three-dimensional time cube: Pa/Pr/Pa, Pr/Pr/Pa, Fu/Pr/Pa, and so on (1987, 210–12). I like to call that a "Rubik's Cube" model of time.
6. "*Alles Schreiben über Zeit endet im Fragment. Zur Zeit gibt es nichts Endgültiges, nichts Abgeschlossenes und nichts Vollständiges. BLEIBEN SIE DRAN!"* (my translation).

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