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Trinity, time and ecumenism in Robert Jenson's theology

ABSTRACT

Robert Jenson, an American Lutheran theologian, is well known as a Trinitarian and ecumenical theologian. In his Trinitarian theology he makes specific choices regarding the relationship between God and time as an attempt to overcome the Hellenistic influences on the early church's theology, especially about the timelessness of God. Jenson proposes a *temporal infinity* or timefullness of God, which is central to the relationships within the Trinity. Jenson temporally defines the unity of the Trinity in relation to the claim that God is in fact the mutual life and action of the three persons, Father, Son and Spirit as they move toward the future. In the Trinity's relationship to time the person Jesus fulfils a very specific role, namely the "specious present", and this temporal location of Him leads in Jenson's theology to a very strong ecclesiology and eventually to specific proposals regarding ecumenism. In this article I will investigate this link between Trinity, time and ecumenism in Jenson's theology.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Jenson is well known as a significant and prolific writer of Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology. He has written extensively and very creatively about the Trinity for more than forty years. Some of his main works as Trinitarian theologian includes his dogmatic works: *Systematic Theology* (1997, 1999),[1] *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (1969), and *Alpha and Omega* (1963, 1969). He also wrote the more comprehensive *Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel* (1982), *Christian Dogmatics* (1984),[2] and the short and popular *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel about Jesus* (1973). Of these books, his *Systematic Theology* should be singled out as his magnum opus in which he systematically synthesised his creative Trinitarian theology that has developed over many years.

It is not only Jenson's books that testify about him as Trinitarian theologian, but also the reaction on his books and other works.[3] He is widely regarded as one of the foremost Trinitarian

1 *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Triune God* (1997) and *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Works of God* (1999). Hereafter referred to as *ST1* and *ST2*. Braaten says these books are undoubtly the crowning fulfilment of Jenson's career and "when he [Jenson] is asked, 'How long did it take you to write it?' his answer is, 'The last forty years.'" (Braaten 2000:8).

2 *Christian Dogmatics* (1984) was written with his colleague Carl Braaten. Jenson wrote the chapters on the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments.

3 Some of the praises and perspectives on his *Systematic Theology* include: "Professor Jenson's *Systematic Theology Volume 1: The Triune God* is certainly a very important book that must be considered by all who are seriously engaged in theological reflection today. It is especially important as a contribution to contemporary discussions of the Trinity which have proliferated in recent years." (Molnar 1999:117); "With his *Systematic Theology* Robert Jenson offers the church a brilliant, robust, and enduring 'critically orthodox' theology that presents the faith of the historic creeds in dialogue with the concerns of modernity and postmodernity." (Mattes 2000:463), and: "Robert Jenson's two-volume *Systematic Theology* is a

theologians of the last half of the twentieth century. Wolfhart Pannenberg writes for example: "Since the 1960s, his [Jenson] books on the concept of God, on eschatological theology, on the Trinity, and on ecumenism have established him as one of the most original and knowledgeable theologians of our time" (Pannenberg 2000:49). Many other respected theologians from different denominations and from all over the world share this high esteem for Jenson's theology.[4] Some regard him as one of the most significant American[5] theologians of our day and even his most stringent critiques[6] have a lot of admiration[7] for his Trinitarian theology.

Robert Jenson is not only well known as a Trinitarian theologian, but also as an ecumenical theologian.[8] The two themes, Trinity and Ecumenism, are very important themes and also very closely interconnected in Jenson's life and work. In my argument I will indicate how Jenson's Trinitarian theology necessarily leads to a strong ecclesiology and how it forms the logical basis for his specific ecumenical ideas and proposals. In this first article I will thus give an exposition of his Trinitarian theology and in a follow-up article I will discuss his ecumenical vision and proposals, which is based on this.

JENSON'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Jenson's theology can be summarized in three interrelated themes, which was also the title of the book on Jenson's theology namely: Trinity, Time, and the Church (2000).[9] I would have

highly creative and individual synthesis of a number of often divergent strands of contemporary theology. An ecumenical and trinitarian theology, it is also a theology of narrative, hope, and of the word." (Watson 2002:201).

4 Although Jenson is sometimes described as an American theologian, he is well known and respected internationally as a theologian. In the book *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson* (edited by Gunton 2000), theologians from all over the world and from many different denominations contributed essays of appreciation and dialogue with Jenson's theology.

5 Stanley Grenz says for example: "Although the list of contributors to the contemporary renaissance in Trinitarian studies is legion… perhaps no one has offered a more thorough-going, challenging and far reaching trinitarian theology than Robert Jenson, who… may indeed be the most significant American theologian of our day." (Grenz 2003:211). Many other theologians from America, like David Hart, and from Europe, like Wolfhart Pannenberg, will agree with Grenz on this.

6 Some of the critique against his theology is that it is a quasi-Hegelian system (Hunsinger, Sholl, Mattes), that his argument against the timelessness of God is flawed (Burgess, Hart), and that his ecclesiology is collapsing Christ into the church (McFarland). Some of these critiques will be discussed in this paper, like those of Hart and McFarland. What is interesting though is that all of his critiques also appreciate a lot of his theological contribution. George Hunsinger (2002:161) says for example: ""Robert W. Jenson gives us the twentieth century's most accomplished systematic theology written in English. It has few peers in any language. It is concise without being trivial, learned but not inaccessible, ecumenical while still rooted in Lutheran confessions, and stunningly fresh and original in its approach to the major topics. No one at any level, whether advanced or neophyte, can fail to learn from this work or remain unchallenged by it. It is the consummate work of a lifetime. Its proper assessment by the ecumenical church will need to be wide-ranging, serious and prolonged. Without attempting to be as encyclopedic as Barth, Jenson has opted instead to be judicious, an endeavor that succeeds admirably."

7 A good example of this is found in the article of Hart (2005) "The Lively God of Robert Jenson" in which he criticises Jenson on many points, but adds then that: "I write neither as disciple of Jenson's, nor as a 'Jensonian,' but only as an admirer" (Hart 2005:32). See also his critique on Jenson in his book *The Beauty of the Infinite* (2003) on pp160-166.

8 See in this regard my article: "Robert Jenson's ecumenical vision based on his Trinitarian thought."

9 Colin Gunton was the editor of this festschrift about Jenson and the strong link between Trinity and ecumenism in Jenson's work is also here emphasised by Gunton: "The chapters in this Festschrift [*Trinity, Time, and Church (2000)*] offer eloquent tribute to the significance of this remarkable achievement of

chosen ecumenism (and not church) as the title, because Jenson (ST1:viii) himself says of his own theology that it is done in "anticipation of the one church." In other words, his Trinitarian theology (specifically his choices regarding the relationship between God and time) and his ecclesiology are consistently written with an ecumenical aim.[10] His whole theology leads thus to his specific ecumenical proposals, and to understand and evaluate that, a clear understanding of Jenson's unique perspectives on the Trinity, the core of his theology, is necessary.

The immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is for Jenson not a theological puzzle, but the framework within which to deal with theological puzzles. It is a doctrine that is nothing less than the comprehensive statements of the gospel's most radical claims. A starting point in Jenson's theology is his agreement with Karl Rahner (and other Trinitarian theologians like Karl Barth) that "the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and vice versa, that is, that God's eternal triune life and his triune history with us in time are somehow one event, that God is not otherwise Father, Son and Spirit in himself than he is among us, and vice versa" (Jenson 2006a:32). It is thus important for Jenson that there will be no ontological chasm between God's triune history in time and his eternal triune being. Jenson is fully aware of the critique that this argument so identifies God with his history among us that God is made dependent on us, but the alternative – of construing eternity by categories like timelessness – is for Jenson alien to the biblical account of God. This thesis of Jenson needs to be unpacked to understand his radical theological and ecumenical proposals and the coherence of his whole argument.

The first important aspect of Jenson's theology is thus his notion that the immanent Trinity is the economic trinity. This viewpoint is not so unique of Jenson's theology, but in Jenson's presentation the difference between the "immanent" Trinity and the "economic" Trinity, almost vanishes[11] so that there is no "analogical interval" between the two.[12] David Hart explains: "Jenson, however, falls within a school of modern, predominantly Protestant thought that chooses to collapse this analogical interval, and to assert that the event of our salvation in Christ and the event of God's life as Trinity are simply one and the same; what occurs in Jesus of Nazareth is in some sense the story of God becoming the God He is, within which story we are also included - for love's sake" (Hart 2005:31). For Jenson there is thus no difference between the God of eternity (in his eternal life) and the God who became man in Jesus Christ in specific time (the Trinitarian God in the history of salvation) and this leads to questions about the relationship between God and time: how can God be completely the God who identifies himself through the

writing on dogmatics for the whole church in an ecumenical key" (Braaten 2000:8).

10 Philip Cary (1999:133) wrote very appreciative of Jenson's aim in this regard: "Arguably the most beautiful and important theology of our time is being develop between the various churches, in ecumenical discussions which elucidate the structure of thought and practice common to all the particular Christian traditions. Robert Jenson's recent work is situated in that between, inhabiting the common space of ecumenical theology and examining its problems."

11 Pannenberg criticised Jenson on this point and mentioned: "It is certainly true that the trinitarian God in the history of salvation is the same God as in His eternal life. But there is also a necessary distinction that maintains the priority of the eternal communion's explication in the history of salvation. Without that distinction, the reality of the one God tends to be dissolved into the process of the world" (Pannenberg 2000:50).

12 David Hart explains this "analogical interval" as the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity that has always been asserted by the Christian theology as "that what happens in the story of salvation is a perfect expression (or dramatic revelation) of how it would be even were there no creatures at all, but also that between his temporal expression and its eternal source there is a relation of grace. God is not affected by time, His eternal identity knows neither before nor after, and the incarnation of the Logos is in no sense necessary to or determinative of that identity" (Hart 2005:31).

history of Jesus (in a specific time), and be the God of creation (the past) and of fulfilment (the future)? If God is not timeless, as Jenson says, and part of this world in Jesus, how is it possible then that God is not dissolved into the process of the world? The answer of these questions, about God and time, is the second main focus point of Jenson's theology.

God is not timeless

Jenson's theology is in a great extent a reaction on the Hellenistic influences on the early church's theology, especially in regard to concepts like the timelessness and impassibility of God.[13] The very definition of God's eternity as "timeless" is something Jenson regards as unbiblical and incompatible with the story of creation and redemption.[14] God is not timeless, but God is "identified by specific temporal actions and is known within certain temporal communities by personal names and identifying descriptions thereby provided" (ST1:44). God is not timeless, but lively, active, an event. Jenson follows Gregory of Nyssa thoughts here and says "God... refers to the mutual action of the identities' divine 'energies', to the perichoretic life" (ST1:214) and "This being of God is not a something, however rarefied or immaterial, but a going-on, a sequentially palpable event, like a kiss or a train wreck" (ST1:214). Jenson prefer to use the term "infinite" (limitlessness) instead of "timelessness" about God. God is not infinite in the sense that he "extends indefinitely, but because no temporal activity can keep up with the activity that he is" (ST1:216). God is infinite not by having no boundaries, but by overcoming the boundaries. Therefore Jenson says God's being should be described as temporal infinity. For Jenson this term demonstrates God's self-liberation from temporal contingencies, without extracting him from history. This description of God is for Jenson more biblical than the Greek concept of timelessness, and says that the "biblical God's eternity is his temporal infinity" (ST1:217). It is a description of God that implicates that "while one might believe that divine temporality necessarily leads one to a god in process or one lacking sovereign lordship... it is precisely this 'overcoming' of boundaries that demonstrates God is Lord" (Curtis 2005:27). God is God because he overcomes all boundaries.[15] He is therefore identifiable by his temporal acts of creation and redemption, but also infinite in the sense that he is not bound by temporality. The implication of this understanding of God is that he is not impassable or immutable, not immune to suffering and change, but a god who is alive and active and involved in the world and its history. God is present, loving, encompassing in our time and place – a timely and timeful God.[16]

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13 Jason Curtis (2005:23) explains that: "According to Jenson, the Greeks, in an effort toward security of existence over against time's fleetingness, defined eternity in terms of timelessness. Since humanity cannot embrace our past, present, and future giving us the coherence of life that we naturally desire, the ancient Greeks projected that ability onto God and therefore defined deity in terms of persistence or immutability. Jenson asserts that while the early church did not simply assimilate Hellenism into its theology, it nonetheless failed to rid itself of certain debilitating features, the pinnacle of which is the notion of divine timelessness."

14 Pannenberg (2000:49) says: "Jenson is surely right in contending that the God of the Bible is identified by temporal events, and indeed by a history of such events. He boldly integrates this insight with his Trinitarian theology by conceiving of the biblical narrative as 'the final truth of God's own reality' in the mutual relations of God the Father, His incarnate Son, and the eschatological accomplishment of their communion by the Spirit."

15 Jenson explains: "Any eternity is some transcendence of temporal limits, but the biblical God's eternity is not the simple contradiction of time. What he transcends in not the having of beginnings and goals and reconciliations, but any personal limitation in having them... The true God is not eternal because he lacks time, but because he takes time" (*ST1*:217).

16 These terms are discussed in more detail by Peters, T 1998. God happens: The timeliness of the triune God. *The Christian Century* 115:1, 342-344.

The Trinity as temporal infinity

According to Jenson this temporal infinity or timefullness of God is not just something ascribed to God, but it is part of the being of God, it is central to the relationships within the Trinity - it defines God. For Jenson there is a clear connection between the poles of time and the mutual triune roles of Father, Son, and Spirit. According to him the "Father is the 'whence' of God's life; the Spirit is the 'whither' of God's life; and... the Son is that life's specious present" (ST1:218-219). So for Jenson, God possesses a past, present, and future in himself, not only as pure duration (as Karl Barth understood it, with no conflict but only peace between source, movement and goal), but also as a temporal infinity.[17] Jenson says God "is temporally infinite because 'source' and 'goal' are present and asymmetrical in him, because he is primally future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself" (ST1:217). So to be God is not only to be infinite (by overcoming boundaries) but temporally infinite and for Jenson that means that time is functioning as a real past, present and future in God himself, and that it is only in the Spirit, the future, that God is able to be freed from the past and present, to be freed from "the timelessness of mere form or mere consciousness" (ST1:217). To be God is thus to be always open to a future and to always open a future.[18] But Jenson is careful not to let the whence (Father) and wither (Spirit) fall apart in God's life and says this does not happen, God's duration is without loss, because "origin and goal, whence and wither, are indomitably reconciled in the action and suffering of the Son" (ST1:219). So it is in the Son, the specious present, that the Father and Spirit (source and goal) finds its unity and are reconciled. With this structure of time within the Trinity Jenson is trying to avoid timelessness on the one hand and try to maintain perichoresis on the other hand. In following Jason Curtis' argument we might agree that Jenson is perhaps overemphasising the temporal location of the Son. Curtis (2005:28) says: "It is an overemphasis in the sense that what becomes crucial for theology is to locate Jesus, not the Spirit of Jesus, but the male Jew who walked the earth." This stress on the temporal location of the Son has implications for Jenson's thoughts about Jesus' presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist and in the church.[19]

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE FUTURE

God as Jenson describes Him, as temporal infinity is clearly a God of the future. Pannenberg makes the remark that Jenson took "a 'futurist option' for theology by conceiving of the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit in terms of the future of God Himself" (2000:49). Jenson says that it is in the Spirit that we find God's own and our future: "The Spirit is God as his and our future rushing upon him and us; he is the eschatological reality of God, the Power as which God is the active Goal of all things" (ST1:160). It is also not a mystery what the future will be, but according to Jenson "it is love that the Spirit brings as the End and as himself" (ST1:220). Jenson summarizes his whole reflection on God's eternity thus as follow: "The temporal infinity that opens before us and so embraces us as the triune God's eternity is the inexhaustibility of one event. That event is the appropriation of all other events by the love actual as Jesus of Nazareth"

17 Jenson agrees with the pure duration of Barth in the sense that "nothing in God recedes into the past or approaches from the future" but he differs from Barth when he adds: "But the difference is also absolute: the arrow of God's eternity, like the arrow of casual time, does not reverse itself. Whence and whither in God are not like right or left or up and down on a map, but are like before and after in a narrative" (*ST1*:218).

18 Jenson says that to be God is to "always creatively opens to what he will be; not in that he hangs on, but in that he gives and receives; not that he perfectly persists, but in that he perfectly anticipates" (*ST1*:217).

19 As mentioned earlier, this will be discussed in more detail in a follow-up article of me with the title: "Robert Jenson's ecumenical vision based on his Trinitarian thought."

(ST1:221). About this triune action of "love" Jenson explains how there are no boundaries (God as infinite) between the persons of the Trinity: "the Father's love can embrace whatever the Spirit's coming brings; the Son's love can endure whatever his Father sends him to do; the Spirit's creativity of love is inexhaustible" (ST1:216). God's eternity is thus worked out in relation to the Spirit who is the futurity of God and it is the Spirit which brings the future Kingdom which Jesus came to establish.

In his explanation of God's temporal infinity it is clear that for Jenson the temporal events of Jesus' death and resurrection belong to his very deity (ST1:49). Jenson says that God is "not only in fact identified by certain temporal events but is apprehended as himself temporally identifiable" (ST1:49). Jenson makes the conceptual move "from the biblical God's self-identification by events in time to his identification with those events" (ST1:59). Traditionally the doctrines of Christ and of the Spirit's coming appeared only in the parts devoted to our history, to what God does to and for us, but now Jenson structure these doctrines to appear as teaching about God himself, as narrative of the history with us with which and by which he identifies himself (ST1:60). The more radical move Jenson then makes is to see Jesus the man as the eternal Son and Word of the Father. There is no *Logos asarkos* for Jenson - that is, no timeless and "fleshless" Word of God (Hart 2005:31). As Jenson states it: "The man Jesus, exactly in his personhood is defined by the life-story told in the Gospels, is the one called Son, the second identity of God. Jesus is the Son, with no qualifications" (Jenson 1999a:317). It is clear that for Jenson the events that constitute the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection directly constitute the being of the God revealed by them. For Jenson "God the Son is not somehow behind or other than what we are given in Christ, he simply is this Christ" (Cumin 2007:164).

This perspective does not only have advantages in terms of Jenson's Christology,[20] but also in terms of what he wants to say about the identity of the Trinity. For Jenson the act of Jesus' life is in no way incidental to the being of God. The opposite is true: "God is what Jesus does" (Cumin 2007:165). So here we see again how Jenson takes Rahner's maxim with as much ontological severity as possible - the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. In other words, the event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection are what establish the identity of God,[21] but does so also in the sense that it brought closure and finality to the true identity of God. Jenson says about a person's identity "for so long as the story simply continues the narrated individuality remains uncertain" and "until I die, it remains uncertain who I shall have turned out to be" (ST1:65). Death is thus necessary to finalise one's identity, and with Jesus' death God's identity is settled because according to Jenson, God too can have no identity except as he meets the temporal end toward which creatures live (ST1:65). But Jenson explains further "the Lord's resolve to meet and overcome death and the constitution of his self-identity in dramatic coherence are but one truth about him. For if death-and-resurrection occurs, this is the infinite dramatic crisis and resolution, and so God's own" (ST1:66).

God's identity as Trinity

So God's identity is constituted by Jesus' death, but his story (and our story with him) continues. This is not a problem for Jenson and he says since God's self-identity is constituted in dramatic coherence, it is established not from the beginning, but from the end, and God is eternally

20 Cumin explains that, for Jenson, "Christology is not about crunching God and world together into the person of Christ, it is about confessing their essential union in him and getting on with the rest of the story," (2007:165) and for Jenson "the unity of deity and humanity in Christ is something of a theological non-issue - Jesus of Nazareth simply is the eternal Son and that should settle it" (2007:166).

21 We can already sense something of the problem here that Curtis criticises Jenson for, namely that "Jenson's trinitarian ontology pushes toward an 'isolated present' of the Son, to the unintended exclusion of the Father and the Spirit" (2005:28).

himself in that he unrestrictedly anticipates an end in which he will be all he ever could be (ST1:66). This end is well known. For Jenson this story of God continues until the Spirit, as the future of God, and us will bring fulfilment. The climax of Jenson's theology is that the end will be theosis. Jenson says: "God and only God is the creature's future. God the Spirit is God's own future and so draws to and into the triune converse those for whom the Trinity makes room" (ST2:26).[22]

We can thus say that the unity of Jenson's theology lies in the fact that the Trinity is temporally defined, in relation to the claim that God is in fact the mutual life and action of the three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, as they move toward the future. This relationship between God and time is central to Jenson's Trinitarian thought, but the relationship between time and space - and consequently our space in God - needs to be clarified if we want to understand what Jenson means with a Trinity that "makes room" for us. As we have seen, for Jenson time is no longer what separates God and world, but time is what they have in common. But while time is something "outside" us, Jenson says that time is inside the divine subjective centre. Jenson follows Augustine that time is "the 'distension' of a personal reality... That is: the 'stretching out' that makes time is an extension not of finite consciousness but of an infinite enveloping consciousness" (ST2:34). So it is in this 'enveloping consciousness' of God that time is internal. So it is not outside God, but inside Him, asymmetrical in his perichoresis that time exists. Furthermore, for Jenson it is "exactly the divine internality of time that is the possibility of creaturehood at all" (Cumin 2007:173). And here we find the strong relationship of time and space when Jenson says: "for God to create is for him to make accommodation in his triune life for other persons and things than the three whose mutual life he is. In himself, he opens room, and that act is the event of creation... We call this accommodation in the triune life 'time'... creation is above all God's taking time for us" (ST2:25). So for Jenson created time is accommodation in God's eternity for others than God and therefore we can speak about "God's roominess" (ST2:25). The implication of this is that everything seems to exist in God and that there is no other way possible for things to exist. This has of course implications for the existence of sin and evil and leads to questions about the moral nature of God, but that is not part of the scope of this paper.[23]

It is clear that in Jenson's understanding of the Trinity's relationship to time that the person Jesus fulfils a very special and specific role namely that he is the life of the Trinity's "specious present" (ST1:219). So present can mean here that Jesus is 'specious' in the sense that His presence is never truly realized but also that Jesus is 'spacious' in the sense that space is itself an aspect of time.[24] Brian Leftow (2003:73) explains: "...His 'specious present' is unlike ours. To experience an extended event in one 'specious present' is to presently experience a stretch of it, as when we seem to see motion. This seems to involve seeing a moving thing in a series of

22 Pannenberg says that it is at this point where Jenson's systematic unity of his theology is found: "unity is provided by the trinitarian perspective: from the beginning, the creation was intended for 'inclusion' in the triune community by virtue of union with Christ, the purpose being a 'perfected human community.' That is the promise of the gospel which is anticipated in the life of the Church and is finally achieved in the final advent of the Kingdom" (2000:49).

23 One of the most critical theologians in this regard on Jenson's theology is David Hart. He explains that the implication of Jenson's theology is that "inasmuch as God has eternally decided to determine His identity in this man [Jesus] - God has eternally elected the world of sin, death, and the devil 'alongside' His election of the Son as context in which the drama of triune love must play out. Thus, even the fallenness of our world falls within the story of God's life as Trinity, but only insofar as that fallenness is overcome by God in Christ" (Hart 2005:31). See also: Hart, DB 2003. *The beauty of the infinite: the aesthetics of Christian truth*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) pp160-166.

24 See also *ST1*:159.

positions in one present experience..." In this 'specious present' that Jesus is, comes together the infinite history of God and the fleeting temporality of the world.[25] On this point Curtis mentions that "Jenson's trinitarian ontology pushes toward an 'isolated present' of the Son, to the unintended exclusion of the Father and the Spirit" (2005:28) and he concludes that this is precisely the tendency in Jenson's version of the Eucharist. The question is how is Jesus present in this time if He is not here? Jenson argues that there is no *Logos asarkos,* so talking about the "Son as historical present is referring to the human, historical Jesus. Therefore, in order for Jenson's view of Trinity and time to hold together, Jesus must be present in a sense that enables us to locate him temporally" (Curtis 2005:31). This temporal location of Him we find according to Jenson in the church and the Eucharist. So the fact that Jenson will have a very strong ecclesiology as part of his theology is thus expected.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Trinity and time in Jenson's theology leads to a very strong ecclesiology in which the suggestion from Jenson is that the risen Christ is simply identical with the Church and there is an equation of the resurrected body of Christ with the church throughout Jenson's theology. Jenson says for example that "Christ is personally the second identity of God, and the *totus Christus* is Christ with the church; therefore the church is not the same way an opus ad extra as is the creation, even when it is perfected in God" (ST2:167). Although he is aware of the problem of this position, he maintains his viewpoint because it makes sense in terms of his understanding of the Trinity and time. He says that the church "is the body of Christ for the world and for her members, in that she is constituted a community by the verbal and 'visible' presence to her of that same body of Christ" (ST2:168). The church is thus truly and literally the revelation of Jesus Christ and if there is no unity in the church it undermines our whole theology and believe of our unity in Christ as His body.[26] The church as the *totus Christus* is thus very important in Jenson's whole Trinitarian theology and that explains his strong ecclesiology and his continued emphasis on ecumenism.[27]

Because Jenson's Trinitarian theology forms the basis for his strong ecclesiology, critique against his ecclesiology should be directed against his theology. An important critique in this regard is about Jenson's theological starting point, namely the collapsing of the analogical interval between the "'immanent' Trinity and the 'economic' Trinity". Both Pannenberg and Hart's critique about this issue have already been mentioned, and the problem is that, in Jenson's words: "Those on the one side of the argument accuse those on the other of so identifying God with history among us as to make him dependent on us. Those of the latter party accuse those of the former of continuing so to construe eternity by categories alien to the biblical account of God – for example, by timelessness" (2006a:33). Of course the different sides have different implications, and Jenson admit that he is among those accused of confusing God and creation.

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25 "That Christ has the divine nature means that he is one of the three whose mutuality is the divine life, who live the history that God is. That Christ has human nature means that he is one of the many whose mutuality is human life, who live the history that humanity is" (*ST1*:138).

26 Pannenberg says: "It is a merit of Jenson's work that he takes Paul's statements on the Church as body of Christ not only as a metaphor but literally." But he also adds: "Yet the precise relationship between Church and body of Christ requires a more careful and differentiated treatment than it receives in these volumes [Jenson's Systematic Theology]" (2000:52).

27 Jenson is in agreement here with Cardinal Kasper (and the general Catholic position presented in the book, *That they may all be one: the call to unity*) that "the great remaining dissensus among the churches, after decades of dialogue, is about the nature of the church itself, and so about the nature of the ecumenical goal itself" (Jenson 2006b:710).

Jenson's defence is however that this is an age old clash that "has recurred throughout theological history, between Alexandria – my side – and Antioch, East and West, Lutheran and Reformed" (Jenson 2006a:33) and it must be add that Jenson at least tries to develop a new understanding of God's relationship to time – the success of which might perhaps not be completed but is still very helpful in the church's development of an ecumenical theology. Jenson's own ecumenical vision and proposals are proof of that and that will be the theme of my follow-up article on Jenson, namely "Robert Jenson's ecumenical vision based on his Trinitarian thought."

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KEY WORDS
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